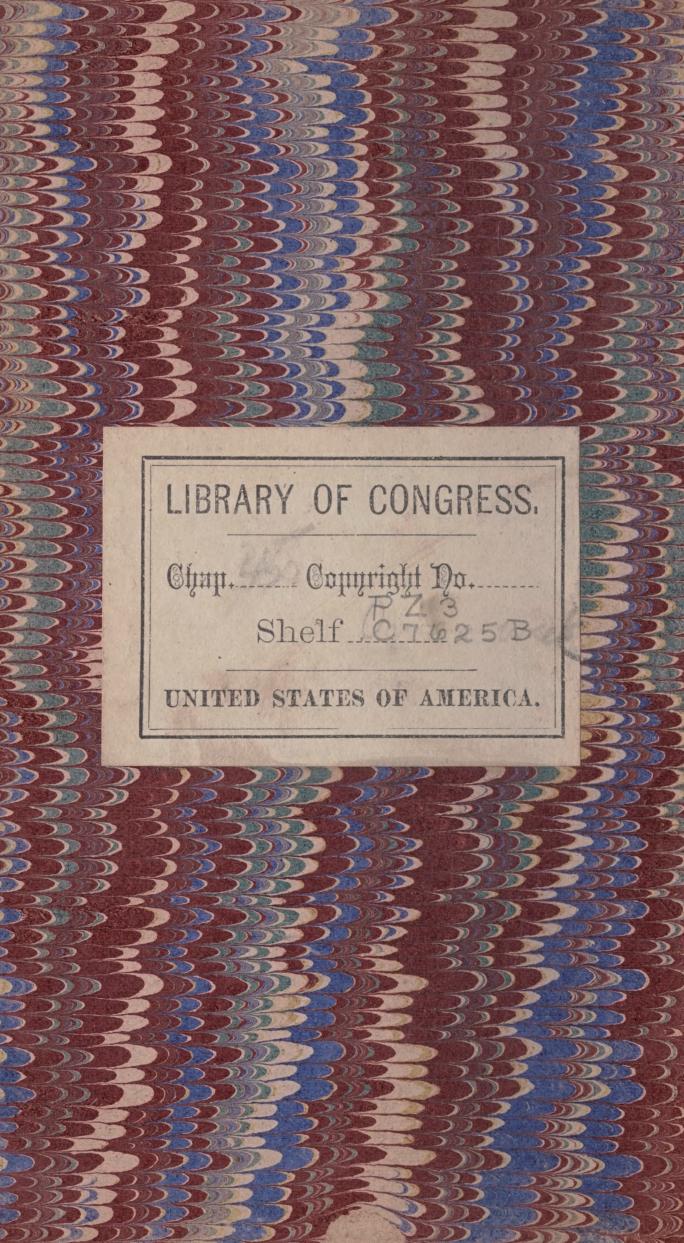
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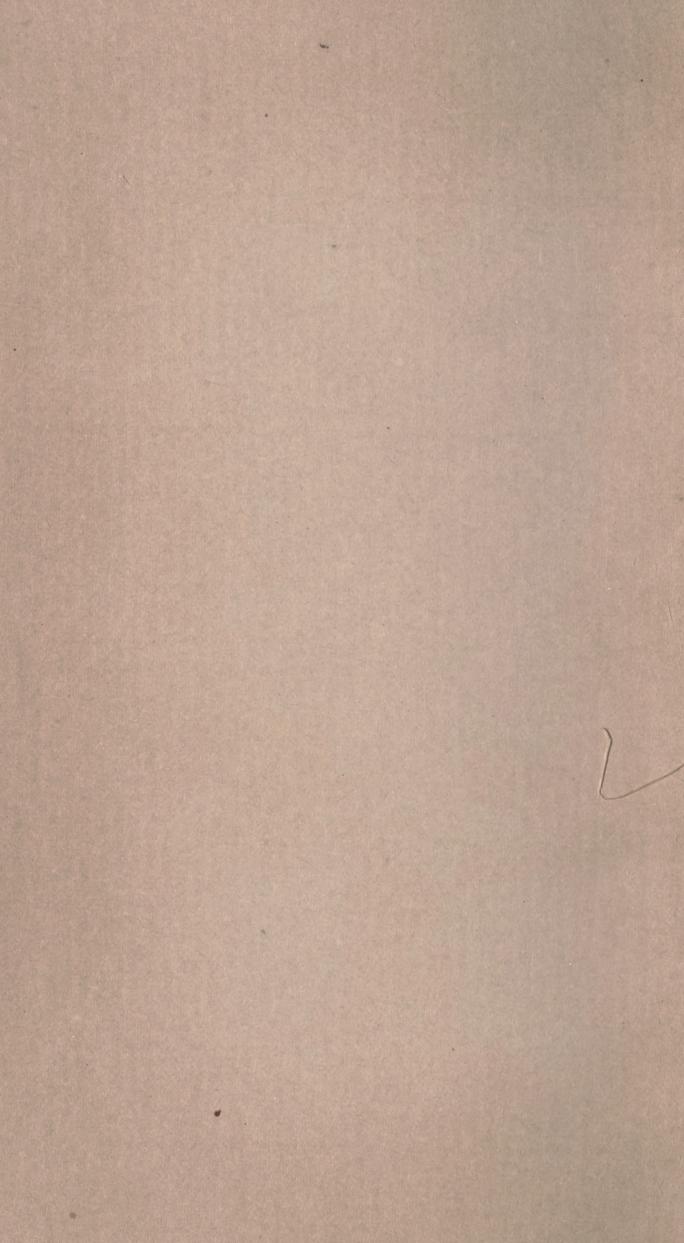














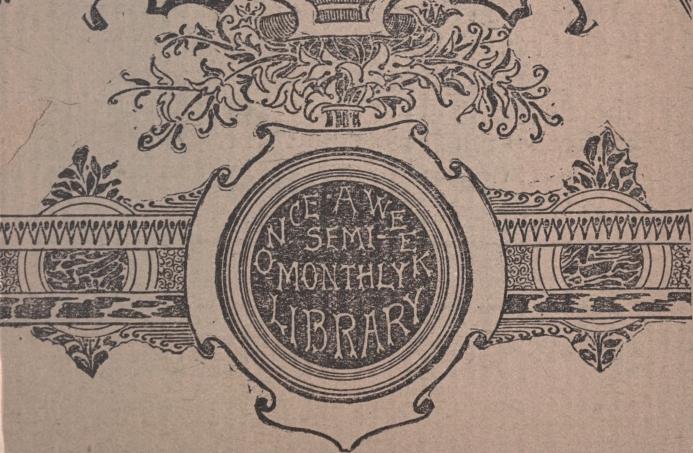


STORY OF LOVE AND SPECULATION.

BY

. CONNERY.

Author of "Don Tiburcio," "The Devil's Finger," " Mexican Tales," etc.



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BLACK FRIDAY;

A STORY OF LOVE AND SPECULATION.

BY

T. B. CONNERY,

Author of "Don Tiburcio," "The Devil's Finger," "Mexican Tales," etc.



Specially written for "Once a Week Library."

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BLACK FRIDAY.

CHAPTER I.

It was one of those very raw days, with much piercingly cold wind and rain, in the city of Chicago. An express train from San Francisco had just rolled into the station, and unloaded at least one-half its human freight amid the din and roar that usually prevail on such occasions. One of the Pullman sleepers was left with a solitary tenant; all the other passengers had disappeared. This passenger was a distinguished-looking young man, tall—a little over six feet—but well built and having the appearance of one whose physical culture had been judiciously cared for. He was handsome, too, possessing that manly style of beauty admired by the gentler sex. Though dressed in an ordinary traveling suit of blue flannel, with a little cap on his head, there was something in the perfect cut of coat, vest and trousers, in the art with which his fine proportions were brought out, and in the way he wore his plain clothes, that stamped him as the scion of a wealthy house.

It is not easy to describe that something; in fact, it is as difficult to explain as it is to counterfeit it. Two men may be of the same stature and wear the same kind of clothes, and yet each may carry himself differently. One will appear thoroughly well-dressed; he will be quite at ease and unconscious of his superior bearing; the other will

be just the reverse. It is that "something" that constitutes the difference. In the case of this particular young man—even if he had not possessed a face rendered so attractive by a pair of soft-brown, dreamy-looking eyes, straight nose and well-formed mouth, above which there was a pretty well-developed mustache-he would have been considered distingué merely from the careless elegance of his clothes and the quiet gentlemanliness of his whole demeanor. There was none of the fashionable languor about his face; on the contrary, when he stood up for a moment and passed his hand through the slightly curly black locks that adorned his head, one could see he was of the nature that demands activity. The way he strode out of the car and exercised his limbs walking quickly back and forth along the depot, showed he was not one of the lollers. The fact was, he was tired of the long confinement of his Pullman palace car accommodation, and he was growing impatient to be at the end of his trip-New York was his destination-and now he was calculating how many of his long strides it would take to cover the distance between the Windy City and the great metropolis of America.

"It would be a capital way to travel," he thought. "I should just like to try how long it

would take me to walk all the way."

He laughed at the idea, which evidently had something exhilarating in it, for his pace increased in length and quickness surprisingly until he found people about the depot regarding him with a mixture of amusement and astonishment.

"Confound it!" he said, half aloud, "can't one

exercise without attracting ridicule?"

His pace slackened, and after a few more minutes of exercise he mounted the car platform and re-entered his Pullman.

He sat down and took up the novel he had been reading. But the noise, bustle and din about the depot annoyed him. He had not noticed them before, but now that he had settled himself comfortably in his compartment, lolling back on the finely cushioned seat, the uproar seemed deafening. The wind whistled ferociously; the engines puffed and shrieked; the baggage men shouted; the baggage wagons rumbled and rolled unceasingly; the newsboys cried their "extrys"; and even Ike, the ebony Pullman attendant, added to the discomfort of the situation by the flirtation he was just then carrying on with a dusky female admirer from "the town."

"Confound it all!" ejaculated the young gentleman, impatiently, letting his novel fall on his knees. "I wish the everlasting din would cease."

- "Did you call, sah?" asked the ebony attendant, hastening to the young gentleman's compartment.
 - "Confound it, no!" answered the traveler.
- "Oh! 'scuse me, sah; thought you'd a-called me," replied Ike, apologetically, but at the same time winking sarcastically at his sweetheart.
- "Ah!" exclaimed the young man, with a sort of groan.
- "Beg pardon, sah; but did you speak?" again asked Ike.

The young traveler deigned no reply. He merely gazed blankly at the darky, until the darky moved away, considerably cowed, and went out of the Pullman.

The young traveler looked about him, up and down the car. He was still alone. None of the former passengers had returned.

"Um! I wonder if I'm to have the car all to myself? Nothing would suit me better," he continued.

He looked out the window and began to whistle idly. Then he settled back on his seat and took up the novel again.

"This way, this way," exclaimed the bustling conductor. "Ike, place the lady's valise and rugs here."

"Yes, sah!—yes, sah!" said the attendant, obeying briskly.

"Thank you," sounded from a clear, musical female voice.

The young gentleman looked up and saw in the compartment directly opposite his own a charming young lady, who, holding her lorgnettes to her eyes, was already contemplating him with calm curiosity. The conductor smiled as he noticed the astonishment of the young gentleman at this singularly bold scrutiny.

"Ike will take the best of care of you, Miss Vernon. Whenever you need anything call him, and you will find him quick and attentive," remarked the conductor.

"Thank you. I'll try to prove his usefulness," responded the young lady, turning to the conductor. "When will we reach New York?"

"About noon to-morrow."

"Good! suits me to a T," said the young lady. When the conductor and Ike had gone the young gentleman ventured to look again toward the owner

of the very musical voice. She was arranging her bangs by the aid of the little panel mirror of her compartment, after the coquettish fashion of young ladies in Pullman cars. Her face was strikingly handsome, the young gentleman observed to himself, as he noted the calm gray eyes, whose lids were fringed with light silken lashes; the short but regular little nose, the small, delicate mouth with well-curved lips, red and tender-looking; the finely formed chin and fair cheeks with a decided flush in the center of each, like the bloom of the carnation rose petal. There was not much in the expression of the face as a whole to suggest forwardness or unfeminine independence; rather the contrary. Had he not been himself the object of her almost rude scrutiny for half a minute or so, he never would have believed the owner of such a face capable of so much calm assurance as she had displayed. At the end of his own rather impertinent staring he exclaimed involuntarily:

"By Jove! very pretty!"

Her head turned at once. There was an amused sparkle in her gray eyes as they met the young gentleman's. He felt himself reddening up, and flustered at the very idea that he was reddening up, as well as because he had made his exclamation so loud as to be audible to the young lady herself. Then, to get out of the thing somehow, he stammered:

He turned away, muttering under his breath:

[&]quot;Beg pardon, miss, but did you speak?"

[&]quot; No."

[&]quot;Oh!"

"What a fool she must consider me to shout out like that."

He held up the novel and tried to read once more, but the print seemed all blurred and confused.

At last the train started off. The young man continued to hold the book before him, and looked over page after page without absorbing any idea of the contents. Was this young man of a particularly susceptible nature? He did not believe so himself, and yet the young lady's face haunted him—her amused smile somehow provoked him—and he could not read understandingly.

"Vernon—Miss Vernon—where have I heard that name before? A very pretty name and a very pretty girl," he was saying to himself all the while.

The young lady coughed two or three times. He did not turn his head, however, until he became aware she was wrestling with the car window. He was on his feet in a moment then and stammering:

"Ah!-allow me, if you please."

Car windows are notoriously stubborn, especially in the case of gallant young men rushing to the relief of beauty in distress. This particular window was simply abominable. It wouldn't budge, as the young man leaned over the young lady in his muscular efforts to dislodge it.

"Confound it! what wretched windows they have on these cars!" he exclaimed, brilliantly. "They are always too tight, or too loose, or too—too—"

"Too something or other," broke in the young lady, with a merry laugh. "Excuse my levity,

but I can't help laughing. Don't trouble any more about it. It's of no consequence."

But the gallant young man was stubborn as well as the window. He was determined it should yield, and made such a mighty effort that it suddenly went up with a bang and a jerk that threw him off his equilibrium and caused him to stumble over the merry maiden, who broke into another musical peal.

"It's too bad," she murmured, helping him to

get up again.

"Too confoundedly awkward, you mean. Pardon me, and accept my thanks," returned the young man, as he backed into his own compartment and sat down with a very red face.

The incident broke whatever conversational ice might have existed before. The tongues of both young people were quite active after the window episode, and as there were no other passengers, the two became well acquainted and almost cordial toward each other in a very short time.

"I hate traveling alone. It's so dull when there's nobody to talk with; don't you think so?" remarked the young lady. "Time passes so much more quickly in conversation."

"Yes, indeed. I always provide myself with books. Would you care to look over some of mine?"

said the young man.

"No, thank you. I prefer conversational brilliancy to books-that is, on the trains. One's eyes are apt to be injured reading in the cars."

The young man felt flattered by this remark.

"Do you travel much?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed. I'm always on the road."

Extraordinary occupation for a young lady. What could she be doing "always on the road," he asked himself.

"Don't you find it tiresome?" he inquired.

"Well, no—not often. One sees so much, encounters so many persons, such a variety of faces, sometimes such queer people, too. And then sometimes one stumbles on a real nice new friend," was the reply.

"I wonder under which head I am classified! Am I one of the 'queers' or the 'real nice's'?"

thought the gallant.

"Going to New York?" asked the young lady.

"Yes, miss. I beg pardon, but suppose we introduce ourselves. I am Mr. Geoffrey Smith, and you are Miss ——"

"Sophie Vernon," promptly answered the young lady, partly rising and making a little curtsey with mock ceremony. "Now we are formally introduced, Mr. Chance has presented me to your highness."

"And Mr. Good Luck has done me the same service, Miss Vernon. I like your name very much and it seems to me I have heard it before."

"Very likely. All the world knows it," was

the placid reply.

All the world! who can she be? How coolly she makes the statement, thought Smith, who murmured "Ah! indeed!" and asked:

"Are you going to New York, too?"

"Very muchly," was the response.

Miss Vernon's manner of speech jarred on him, and he marveled at her free-and-easy mode of conversing with himself, a mere stranger.

- "But she's awfully pretty," said he to himself.
- "Is New York your home, Mr. Geoffers?" asked Miss Vernon.
- "Mr. Geoffrey Smith is my name," answered Smith, "not Geoffers."
- "Of course. How stupid to forget so soon!" replied the young lady, with a little laugh.

He thought it really was a little stupid, Smith being such an easy name to remember.

"New York is not my home. I am a Californian," said Geoffrey.

"Oh! all the way from California! Is it possible?" exclaimed Miss Vernon, with a pretty gesture of astonishment. "And you have come all the way in the cars?"

"Well, I haven't walked any of the way," said Geoffrey.

Miss Vernon broke into one of her merry laughs.

"You said that real comically," she observed.
"You would do first-rate for comedy."

She looked at him with a nod of approval.

- "You think so?" interrogated Geoffrey, who was greatly puzzled. "Why?"
- "Oh, because you can say funny things with such an innocent air."
 - "Really!"
- "Really and truly," Miss Vernon declared, again imitating slightly Geoffrey's voice.

The train stopped for lunch, and Geoffrey gallantly offered to escort Miss Vernon to the restaurant.

"I don't care so much to eat as to stretch my limbs after sitting so long. Don't let me interfere with your lunch, though," said Miss Vernon. Geoffrey had a sharp appetite, but protested he preferred to exercise, too.

"Then suppose you lay in fodder for both, and munch it when the car starts. Then we'll lose neither exercise nor food," suggested the amazing young lady.

"Capital thought!" said Geoffrey, who ordered the Pullman porter to "lay in fodder" of various kinds, and then promenaded the station platform with Miss Vernon until the signal of "All aboard!" was shouted.

CHAPTER II.

On re-entering the Pullman, Geoffrey took occasion to ask the conductor aside:

"Who is Miss Vernon?"

The conductor regarded him with a look of compassion.

"Don't you know? Why, she's the actress."

"Ah!" murmured Geoffrey, "I thought so."

In point of fact he had not thought so, but he wanted the conductor to believe he had.

The information jarred on him. He had no prejudice against actresses, but he would have liked the young lady to be something else. He had heard that actresses were dangerous and he had an inclination to cut Miss Sophie's acquaintance then and there. But how could he? He had provided "the fodder," as Miss Sophie had called the luncheon, and he was compelled to do the honors, nolens volens. He promised himself that

after the luncheon he would bury himself once more in his books and have as little talk as politely possible with Miss Vernon.

"Awfully extravagant," was Miss Vernon's exclamation, when the "fodder," consisting of sundry broiled chickens, dainty sandwiches, cake, fruit and wine, was spread out before her on the spotless cloth covering the snug table arranged by the porter. "This is more than I bargained for, Mr. Smith. How much did it cost?"

"Really, Miss Vernon, I don't know—" began Geoffrey.

"Really, Mr. Smith," broke in the young lady, imitating her companion's slow speech, "you must find out. What's the damage, porter?"

"Three dollars, miss," said the porter.

"Ruin and desolation!" exclaimed Miss Vernon, with mock despair. "Then I owe you one dollar and fifty cents, Mr. Smith."

She opened her pocketbook and handed the amount to Geoffrey, who looked puzzled and mortified.

"Don't ask me to take it. I couldn't, really, Miss Vernon. You won't mind letting me play host, will you?" pleaded Geoffrey.

"Yes, but I will mind it. It's not square to sponge on you, Mr. Smith. Take your change

and let's pitch in," rejoined Miss Vernon.

"Not square," "sponge on you," "pitch in," repeated Geoffrey to himself, while he looked with astonishment at the actress attacking the chicken with healthy appetite. "I wish she wasn't so slangey."

"Aren't you going to eat anything, your-

self?" asked the actress, looking up for a moment.

"Certainly," said Geoffrey, tackling a wing.

"Take some wine and fill me a glass," observed the young lady, with her mouth full.

"My! that's delicious! you don't mean to tell me that came from that way-side inn," exclaimed Miss Vernon. "Why, it's Pommard, by all the Gods!"

"No, it's not from 'the way-side inn,' as you are pleased to call the railroad restaurant. That's a bottle of some wine I brought with me from 'Frisco,' replied Geoffrey, with difficulty restraining a loud laugh.

"Why, you must be a regular swell, Mr. Smith. I like good wine. It's really jolly 'grubbing' in this way. Don't you think so? I always enjoy these little meals, free and easy like, with a jolly companion like yourself."

"You find me jolly?" demanded Geoffrey.

"Yes, sort of jolly—not loud and noisy—but genteely jolly. I think you could be as bad as myself, though, if you let yourself out," answered the actress.

"Really!" ejaculated Geoffrey.

"Why do you say 'really 'all the time, like an Englishman? But, perhaps, you are an English swell traveling incog," said Miss Vernon, looking up with pretended horror. "Don't tell me you are, for I hate Englishmen."

"Allay your fears, Miss Vernon, and have another wing? Some more wine?"

Geoffrey poured out another glass, which Miss

Vernon swallowed at once, and held her glass for more.

"No, I'm not English. I'm Irish, and I don't know but I'm a Fenian, to boot. Will that satisfy you?"

Geoffrey was becoming decidedly amused and interested. His resolution to cut the actress's acquaintance was rapidly evaporating with the wine.

- "You're not Irish, I know," said Miss Vernon, after a pause.
- "By birth, no, for I am a native of San Francisco. But father and mother are both Irish," rejoined Geoffrey. "Why do you dislike Englishmen?"
- "Oh! I don't know. Prejudice, perhaps, inherited from pa and ma. But change the subject. Do you know I find you a very nice fellow?"
 - "Really, now!" exclaimed Geoffrey.
- "There you go again with your 'really.' Shoot it! Kill it! And never may I hear it more," cried Miss Vernon, with stage voice and action.

Geoffrey laughed, and said:

- "To oblige you, I'll try to reform my speech."
- "Do so, my lord. What beautiful grapes!" said Miss Vernon. "How did the colored gentleman find you such lovely fodder?"
- "I trained him from 'Frisco. He has brought in my lunch every day and has learned my weaknesses," answered Geoffrey.
- "Then you are a swell. I was quite right," Miss Vernon remarked, with a triumphant look.
 - "I never had so many pretty things said to me

before by a young lady," observed Geoffrey. "Don't spoil me before I get to New York."

"How long are you going to remain there?" demanded Miss Vernon.

- "That's uncertain. I don't know myself," was the response.
 - "Where will you hang out?"
 - "Eh?"
- "Where will you pitch your tent—to what hotel are you going? You know what I mean."
 - "I have not decided on that."
- "You would want of course a big hotel?" queried Miss Vernon. "A private house wouldn't suit a swell like you, I guess."
- "I have no prejudices that way; why do you ask?"
- "Because, if you are going to remain in New York for some time, I might direct you to a nice, home-like place, if you don't want display."
 - "I don't."
- "Very well, then, I will give you the address of a respectable widow. If you can get in there, I think you will be pleased."
 - "Do you stop there?" demanded Geoffrey.
- "Not exactly—but close by," answered the actress.
 - "I think I should like to try it."
 - "And it please your lordship, do so."

By this time Geoffrey had made up his mind Miss Sophie Vernon was a very unusual type of young lady even for an actress. In spite of her slang and unconventional ways, he was inclined to like her and to believe her a proper enough girl.

"She is better than she seems, I'm sure; and

I don't know but the eccentric airs are put on for effect. Acting, perhaps," thought Geoffrey. "These theatrical people, I suppose, are always playing—more or less. Anyhow, she's amusing and good sport."

These thoughts decided him to try the private house recommended by his companion, especially as he could quit at any time should it prove undesirable, or should Miss Sophie herself become too much of a good thing. For he was taking it for granted, somehow, that the actress would be hovering between her own quarters and the house of the respectable widow, when not occupied with her theatrical duties.

He thought of his mother's warning just before parting, and smiled. "Odd she should think it necessary to speak to me on such a subject. I wonder if she thinks me too soft—easily influenced by a pair of pretty eyes and likely to be victimized by the first clever adventuress that comes along. No, gentle mother, that's not the kind of material your son is made of."

Geoffrey felt quite sure on that point.

CHAPTER III.

HE felt sorry after all when he reached New York—irksome as had been the long railroad ride before the meeting with Miss Vernon. He felt sorry, too, that he had not given her his right name instead of the first that occurred to him to assume when he wished to oil the wheels of conversation by a sort of formal introduction. He felt more than sorry-rather mean when they finally parted at the Pennsylvania station. He had wished several times to confess the petty deceit to the young lady, but the fear that she would be angry and cut him restrained him from telling the truth. So, after a day or two at the hotel, he hunted up the house recommended to him by the actress, and hired of the landlady, Mrs. Anderson, a whole floor. The house was on West Eleventh street, not far from Fifth avenue, and right opposite the small hotel where Miss Vernon took up her quarters.

There was only one other tenant, a young Wall Street broker, named George Fenton, in the Anderson house. With this young gentleman Geoffrey soon became intimate. Fenton was four or five years his senior, and rather young to be a broker of such prominence as he enjoyed. Yet he was a master of finance and thoroughly versed in all the queer ways of Wall Street. Indeed, he was one of those prodigies that turn up in "the Street" as well as in other walks of life occasionally. He was not only shrewd and successful as an operator, but

a thoroughly respectable young man of fortune, warm-hearted, generous and impulsive, in spite of the calm intrepidity he displayed in the perilous game of speculation.

George Fenton was decidedly stylish-looking, and scrupulously careful of his personal appearance. He took especial pride in his jet black hair, which was abundant and curly. In truth, Fenton's hair was his weakness. So solicitous was he of its welfare that he never missed his morning call to the barber, who devoted half an hour to twisting and turning and greasing delicately each particular lock in the way its master desired.

George Fenton was famous wherever he went for not wearing his hat. He loved to move about in the street carrying in his right hand his hat and in his left an open umbrella, so that the beauty of his luxuriant hair and the art of his barber could be known and seen and admired of all the world. His friends and acquaintances smiled at this extraordinary weakness in the character of one otherwise so level-headed and manly; but even those who did not like him and sneered at "the dandy broker," had to acknowledge his shrewdness and skill whenever there was any question of business transactions.

Geoffrey was the only son of the famous California millionaire, Geoffrey Sims, Sr.—an Irishman who had gone to the then new State in the height of the great gold fever, and by a rare combination of good luck and hard industry had amassed a colossal fortune. When his son returned home from college, covered with academical honors, Sims, Sr., made him a present of one hundred thousand

dollars, in token of his satisfaction, saying to him at the same time:

"You are young yet, Geff, but I have faith in you. This money is your own to dispose of as you like. But if you want to please me, you will learn to live on the interest—less than that even. It will show your fitness for larger confidence hereafter. Rich men's sons are generally useless, extravagant, vicious. Be a glorious exception, Geff. Prove that you are superior to the general run—show, in fact, that you are the true son of your old father."

Geff had justified the paternal confidence by iving on one-half the interest of his father's liberal gift, and showed no disposition to fall into the fashionable follies and vices of "the general run."

But all the same he had quarreled with his father, and his trip to New York was in a measure compulsory. But he had his one hundred thousand dollars and more snugly deposited in bank in New York, and could live most comfortably, if not luxuriously, and spare a little for an occasional spurt in Wall Street under the guidance of George Fenton. His spurts were profitable. Fenton would seldom encourage Geoffrey to dabble in stocks, and more frequently declined than accepted his friend's money to speculate. "Hold off just yet," was Fenton's way of cautioning Geoffrey that it was not always safe to jump into "the Street."

After a month's acquaintance, Geoffrey considered George Fenton "a perfect brick," and before three months had rolled around the two young men had become bosom friends.

Meanwhile our Geoffrey had not met Miss Vernon since the day of his arrival in New York. He had not seen her even, except before the footlights on the stage, and his preconceived notion that she would be hovering between Mrs. Anderson's and her own hotel proved altogether erroneous. She had rooms, as already stated, in a semi-hotel across the street from Mrs. Anderson's. It was a place chiefly patronized by theatrical and artistic people-painters, writers, dancers, singers and the queer lot who follow in their wake. Just the sort of people Geoffrey felt he could never like. Sophie Vernon was a celebrity in her way—she must command good pay. Why did she select such an unsuitable place to live? Geoffrey asked himself often.

Before parting with him at the Pennsylvania station, she had given him her address, and he had called at her hotel twice since then. But she was out both times. And Geoffrey, who had rather feared he was to be pursued and haunted by the chaffing young actress, found himself completely left alone. And now he was rather inclined to resent this unexpected indifference to his existence. Was she putting on airs with him? he asked himself. If so, he would show her that sort of thing would not do with him, a millionaire's son—heir to—Oh! well, of what consequence anyhow? All for the best, no doubt. Let her go.

How often people say similar things, knowing all the while that they don't mean them! The fact was, Geoffrey was longing to see and speak with the young actress again, though he hardly knew why. Certainly he was not in love. It was only

may be, he thought, because she was so jolly, unconventional and different from all the young ladies he had ever before encountered.

Something over four months after his arrival in New York he went out in the morning with his friend Fenton, and was walking back to his lodgings in West Eleventh street, when suddenly he saw a form emerge from the actress's hotel. A young lady in a tightly fitting blue gown, holding in her hand an exquisite parasol of the same color with dainty white lace trimming. That supple form and graceful walk he knew so well. Yes, it was Miss Sophie Vernon, and she was coming in his direction! Let her go! Oh, no! The glow of pleasure with which he beheld her again put all such thoughts to flight. Resentment vanished before the radiant vision of the young lady.

"What's up, Geoffrey?" demanded Fenton, on noticing his friend's unwonted excitement.

Geoffrey did not answer, for Miss Vernon was looking straight at him only a few yards off. He raised his hat, but Miss Vernon only half returned the salute, seeming not to recognize him. Her hesitation was only for a second, however, when she returned his salute fully, with a decided appearance of real pleasure.

"Oh! it is you, is it, Mr. Smith? I'm really pleased to see you."

Geoffrey turned and walked at her side.

"Yes, I'm really pleased to see you," she repeated.

"I called twice at your hotel—" began Geoffrey.

"Oh, yes, I know; and no doubt you have,

but you have put me down in your black list as rude, and so forth," quickly observed Miss Vernon, smiling at him quizzically, as she bestowed on him a side upward glance of inquiry.

"Not at all," responded Geoffrey, with well-assumed sincerity. "They told me you were very

busy and-"

"You did not resolve to cut me? Very nice of you," said the actress, banteringly. Then, in a serious tone, she added: "You know actresses are very busy people during the season; but in three days more it will be over and I will be free again. Then you may——"

"Then I may call, I suppose, without encountering your chilling dragon?" said Geoffrey.

The actress laughed merrily, in the rich, musical tones so well known on the stage.

"Yes, then you can come on, Macduff. The dragon won't devour you now. But don't let me take you from your friend. Besides, I'm in a hurry; so good-by. Au revoir. Ta-ta, Mr. Smith."

She waved her parasol coquettishly in token of adieu, and was about to depart, when she asked:

- "By the way, how do you like Anderson's? Jolly, isn't it?"
 - "Splendid," answered Geoffrey.
- "I thought you might, but I'm glad my recommendation was not disappointing. Good-by, again, Mr. Smith."

She moved off and soon disappeared around the corner.

- "Who's your pretty friend, Geoffrey?" asked Fenton.
 - "Miss Vernon," was the answer.

"What! Sophie Vernon, the actress?"

"Yes; why?"

"Oh! nothing. How did you come to meet her? Never supposed you had tastes that way."

"How do you mean 'that way'?" demanded

Geoffrey, a little nettled.

"I mean I did not suppose you were a lady's man—that you cared for female society."

"And why not?"

Geoffrey half suspected Fenton was quizzing him, but he added:

"I met the young lady on the train from California. She got on at Chicago."

"And you had her delightful society all the way to New York?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Seen much of her since?"

"Not once since we parted at the station, except on the stage, until to-day."

"Ah!" exclaimed Fenton, as if struck with an

idea.

"And, by the way, I fancied she called you by a strange name."

Geoffrey colored slightly.

"Yes, George, I'm ashamed to confess I did practice a little deception, which I greatly regret."

"She knows you as Mr. Smith?"

" Yes."

"That's awkward. She'll be sure to find out."

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly, if you renew your intimacy," answered Fenton, lightly. "But I presume you won't. She's certainly uncommonly pretty and a clever actress, too. I have enjoyed her performance

often. By the way, this is her benefit night. Suppose we go?"

"All right," responded Geoffrey.

"Yes, she's decidedly pretty," said Fenton, in an absent way. "Actresses generally are—on the stage. But this one is fascinating on and off, evidently. Is she good company? They tell me actresses are amusing off the stage. I have never met one myself, and somehow I don't think I should care much for that sort of cattle."

They had reached their house and entered. "Cattle!"

Geoffrey thought the expression somehow insulting. "Miss Vernon a cow, for example," said he, when in his own room alone. "I wonder what she would say if she heard George classify her under the head of 'cattle'? Well, never mind."

CHAPTER IV.

What did Geoffrey mean by "the dragon"? The friend, chaperon and most intimate associate of the young actress—a middle-aged woman, named Sands, whom he encountered on the two occasions he had called at Miss Vernon's hotel. His reception by Mrs. Sands was so indifferent, even chilling, that he had jumped to the conclusion she must be some near relative acting in the capacity of chaperon, whose duty it was to warn off or freeze off all callers likely to interrupt Miss Sophie during her theatrical season. Hence he had dubbed her "the

dragon"—an ugly old dragon, too, he vowed, since she was so discourteous and snappish.

The fact was, Mrs. Sands was a very good-natured and very useful companion to the motherless and fatherless actress. She was herself an actress, but understood the histrionic art better than she could execute. For that reason she was capable of imparting very valuable hints to her more talented young friend, Sophie. At the same time she was a protection, for though quite unconventional and free in her manners, she was, on the whole, right-minded and careful in guarding Sophie from the pitfalls always open for young and pretty actresses.

Sophie looked up to her in many ways, and was glad to have somebody like the "governor," as she called Mrs. Sands, to lean upon. The "governor" was by no means ugly or snappish, but a very warm-hearted, respectable and fairly good-looking woman, who had seen better days and had been perhaps handsome when younger. She was devoted to Sophie, sharing her likes and dislikes, and Geoffrey found her very amiable and courteous to him.

When at last "the season" was over, and Sophie was free from her theatrical cares, he often went "over the way" with George Fenton, but more often still went alone, to spend a few hours with Sophie and her friend, and he enjoyed the visits. It was a novel experience for him, this every-day life of a pretty actress, and he saw very much to interest him, deeply. There was nothing sentimental or spooney, however, about the intimacy that soon sprang up. He liked her—yes, amazingly, but not as a lover. If he had had any such feeling after the accidental encounter in the

Pullman, and the subsequent months of waiting, he was soon cured; for he could see her every day without acceleration of pulse or the slightest approach to sentiment.

It was a strictly platonic attachment on his part. He felt it was a sort of privilege—and perhaps his vanity was soothed—to be the intimate friend of the great favorite. But love, or matrimony! Pshaw! such a thought was absurd. Sophie and he were not suited to each other—not in the least—and there was not the least bit of danger in their intimacy!

He got into the habit of spending part of each day with her—often dining or supping with her and Mrs. Sands—and not infrequently accompanying them in little rural excursions. It was not strange that after awhile he began to feel a sort of proprietorship in the young lady, and advised her like a brother, or old friend of years' standing. Sophie was free and unconventional in a way he could not approve sometimes—for the high standard of his mother was always before him—and he could not help criticising frequently Sophie's eccentric frankness. He liked the "governor," too, very much, but thought her not always the best kind of a model, and adviser for the actress.

When a young gentleman and a young lady are seen very much together day after day, week after week, everywhere, in city and country, people are apt to talk. The gossips construe it in one of two ways: Either matrimony is ahead, or—well, the young lady ought to be more careful, that's all.

Geoffrey never dreamt of possible complications—of the dubious opinions that might be formed—

nor of the injury his intimacy might cause to the actress's reputation. As for Sophie, tam poco, as the Spaniards say. Perhaps Geoffrey was quite excusable, for it was a long time before anybody hinted the idea of danger to either one or the other. He never thought of the possibility of Sophie becoming seriously attached to him, for almost at the very inception of their intimacy she had declared herself out of the list of marriageable young ladies.

Mrs. Sands had said to Sophie one day in his

presence:

"I don't think you could ever manage without me at your elbow, Sophie—even if you were married."

"Perhaps not, 'governor.' But make your mind easy—I never intend to marry," was Sophie's quick response.

"Stuff! You'll be married before another

year," exclaimed the "governor."

"Not much! no husband for me, 'governor.' I prefer the stage. Love-making before the foot-lights is quite enough," Miss Vernon declared.

"Stuff! stuff!" again exclaimed Mrs. Sands.

"'Stuff' as much as you like, 'governor.' It's fact all the same," rejoined Miss Vernon.

"You really prefer your art?" asked Geoffrey, joining in.

"Certainly," was the prompt answer.

"No matter who might propose?" persisted Geoffrey.

"The man is not born who could woo me from the stage," said Miss Vernon, with comic earnestness. Mrs. Sands smiled incredulously.

"A day comes to every girl," Mrs. Sands uttered oracularly, "when she is all heart. Yours will come, too, my young lady, "and I hope it will be for your good. I think I already see signs of its approach."

Sophie laughed in derision, while she colored visibly, for she could not misunderstand her "governor's" meaning. Mrs. Sands had made no secret of her opinion from the very beginning—in her private communings with Sophie—that Mr. Geoffrey Smith "meant business" and would in due time formally propose.

"He is one of your slow-pokes, but if he is slow at least he's sure," the chaperon had said.

CHAPTER V.

In illo tempore a famous actor and playwright named John Bolton dwelt with his wife in a snug little house on Irving place. He was a universal favorite—thanks to his wit and sterling good qualities—and his wife was scarcely less esteemed on her own account. Their little house was the resort of the brightest spirits of the day—especially on the actor's "off day"—Sunday. For the afternoons of that day it was the habit of "genial John" to invite a few choice friends to take "pot luck" with him, and the "pot luck" generally extended into the evening when other friends than the favored few would drop in one after the other until the little parlor and dining-room became

crowded. Then mine host would put up outside the parlor door a flaring notice of "standing room only," sure sign to all comers not that no more were welcome, but that the fun and merriment were at their height.

Geoffrey Sims became acquainted with the Boltons through Miss Vernon, and occasionally accompanied the young actress and the "governor" to the "Sunday evenings." He enjoyed the visits immensely—they were so different from what he saw anywhere else. The genuine unceremonious hospitality delighted him, and the flashes of wit, the rollicking anecdotes and recitations, the music and merriment he encountered made him feel brighter and happier. It was not only actors and actresses he met, but artists, journalists, authors, lawyers and sometimes even liberal-minded clergymen, whose creed did not include gloomy, dismal Sabbaths in the Divine precepts.

Geoffrey found himself in high favor with the Boltons, who soon included him in one of their "pot lucks"—a mark of the highest esteem. The "governor" had another engagement for that day and Geoffrey found himself destined to be the sole companion of Sophie to and from the little Irving place Mecca.

The pot-luck dinner party comprised three members of the theatrical profession and three journalists, besides Geoffrey and Sophie, and host and hostess, and never was there a jollier company. The young Californian would have considered the affair without flaw only for the teasing he endured from Mrs. Bolton—who was an inveterate matchmaker—on the subject of his attentions to Sophie.

It had begun to be a sore point with him by this time, for he was but too well aware that the gossips were concerning themselves about his relations with the favorite young actress. Over and over again he had resolved to make his visits to Sophie less frequent, but he found it easier to resolve than to act. It was hard to resist the temptation of going, for the habit of calling once a day had fastened itself on him like a part of his nature. He had come to consider himself as a sort of brother to the light-hearted young creature, who never concealed her pleasure on seeing him, talked to him with the utmost freedom, consulted him on every subject and relied upon him in a way as guide, counselor, friend and escort. It was exasperating that the world would not leave them to the innocent enjoyment of their charming intercourse—that the busybodies must insist upon marrying them, though neither, he believed, had a thought of such a thing, and only asked to be let alone.

"I do wish people would mind their own business," Geoffrey would exclaim at times. "Sophie has declared to nearly everybody that she is not in the matrimonial lists—that the lucky man don't breathe who could make her change her name. Isn't that enough?"

It really appeared not to be enough, for even good, warm-hearted, generous Mrs. Bolton would not be convinced. After the dinner, she drew Geoffrey to a seat beside her on the sofa and began one of her little confidential tête-à-têtes. Geoffrey spoke up rather more plainly than was his wont.

"My dear Mrs. Bolton, it's a huge mistake this talk of anything but pure friendship between Sophie and myself, and I do hope people won't bother the poor girl herself. Neither of us thinks of marriage. Sophie would have me, I suppose, as soon as any man; but she won't have any man. I understand her perfectly, and she, I hope, understands me."

"I don't believe in your platonic business. It's always a sham—only a silly shield for flirtation," said Mrs. Bolton.

"But there is no flirtation in our case. I would as soon flirt with yourself as Sophie," retorted Geoffrey.

"You may say what you like in that way. It won't change the world's opinion. Everybody believes you two engaged—or on the brink of engagement—and I hope it's the truth. A good thing it would be for both of you, too," replied Mrs. Bolton.

"Really, I can't help your opinion, Mrs. Bolton, and it seems useless for me to try to prove it erroneous. What can I say?" concluded Groffrey in a lower tone, as he saw Sophie drawing near.

It was destined to be a fateful night for him. The chat with Mrs. Bolton put him in a sort of bad humor with himself and all the world. Walking home with Sophie he was unusually silent. Generally he was light, airy and buoyant as herself. This night he was entirely monosyllabic, and, Sophie thought, a little gruff. It took a good deal to dampen such ardor as hers, but after awhile her spirits were chilled, and she became as dumb as himself.

Arrived at the entrance of the little theatrical

hotel, Geoffrey opened the door to admit her, without attempting to follow.

- "Aren't you coming in to say good-night to the governor'?" she asked.
 - "Not to night," was the curt answer.
- "Oh! very well," replied Sophie, in a subdued tone; "good-night, then."

The door closed quickly and she was gone.

In a moment he felt he had done wrong—that unintentionally he had pained the young ladyperhaps grievously offended her. He stood irresolutely uncertain whether to follow at once and apologize, or go home. Slowly he retreated, crossed the street to his own door and entered, expecting to find Fenton waiting for him. But Fenton was not there-nobody seemed to be astir, and the silence of the house oppressed him. He felt mean and self-reproachful; disgusted at the idea that the chatter of outsiders could so affect him as to make him forgetful of what he owed to Sophie. It was a new experience to him, and after enduring it ten minutes he went out again, crossed to the little hotel, mounted the stairs and knocked timidly at the door of Miss Sophie's sitting-room. There was no answer, though he heard a noise within that made him anxious. He knocked again without answer, and then, opening the door, entered. He started on seeing Sophie in Mrs. Sands's arms weeping and sobbing.

"Why, Sophie! Miss Vernon! what is the matter?" exclaimed the young man, advancing toward her. "Is anything wrong?"

"You ought to be able to answer best," said Mrs. Sands, sharply. "She came direct from you agitated and excited as she is now. What did you do to cause her so much distress?"

"Can it be possible, Sophie, I am in any way the cause of this?" asked Geoffrey, very penitently. "Forgive me if I am."

He sat down at her side and took a hot, unresisting hand. Her sobs redoubled, and he felt so much disturbed that he could not keep out of his voice a little tender quaver, as he said:

"Don't go on that way, Sophie; I can't bear it." The girl suddenly stood up and confronted him.

"I think you were very cross and not—not—not over polite to me just now—I do—and—" said Sophie in broken tones, hesitating.

"And what, my dear little friend?" asked

Geoffrey.

"Well, you spoke cross and harsh and-"

"I would rather lose my tongue than do that, Sophie," protested Geoffrey. "It's a mistake."

"Then you did not mean anything-you were

not angry?" queried Sophie.

"Certainly not. But I must have been absentminded. I know I was, and probably unintentionally rude. Won't you forgive me anyhow? You must know how cut up I feel," entreated Geoffrey.

"I do forgive," replied Sophie, smiling through

her tears. "There-let it all go."

She extended her hand impulsively and Geoffrey seized it.

"Pardon me, too, for being so foolish as to make such a time about a trifle. There, excuse me for a few moments," she added, and quitted the room.

"You see how it is now," said Mrs. Sands, in a

low tone. "The girl loves you. I foresaw it. I knew it would come to something like this."

"Loves me?" echoed Geoffrey. "Do you think it possible, Mrs. Sands? Do you forget her declaration that she would never marry?"

"Only girls' wild talk. They all say that, and end by loving some man or other desperately," replied Mrs. Sands, confidently.

Sophie glided into the room again at this point, with smiling countenance and all traces of the tell-tale tears washed away. The serious looks of Geoffrey and the "governor" were observed at once by the young lady, who said:

"Pshaw! I have made everybody uncomfortable! Let us forget all about the ugly business. 'Governor,' won't you do the honors? Won't you get some of the best, and let us drink and be friends?"

Mrs. Sands was about to pour out some wine from an opened bottle of champagne, which Geoffrey now for the first time observed on the little bijou table.

"No, no; not that. Get the best," cried Sophie.

Mrs. Sands went to the inner room, and Sophie took advantage of her absence to say, with a little tremor still in her voice:

"You must think me a precious baby, Geoffrey, to go on so."

"Not at all," answered Geoffrey, very gently.
"I am only surprised at my own selfish blindness, and at the fact that my supposed rudeness could have—" he hesitated to finish the sentence.

"Could have such a tearful effect," added Sophie, with forced calmness. "Well, I am surprised myself; but let us change the subject."

The color deepened, and Geoffrey noticed an evidence of unusual excitement in her eyes.

The "governor" presented well-filled goblets of the sparkling wine to Geoffrey and Sophie. The young man barely tasted it. Sophie quaffed hers at once, and the excitement in her eyes became more pronounced. Geoffrey attributed it to the combined effect of the mental distress and the wine, and felt charitably disposed. To him, at that moment, anything was preferable to her tears. Therefore he saw her swallow another goblet without uneasiness, though he noted the reckless brilliance of her beautiful eyes and the unaccustomed freedom in her speech that followed.

To gratify her, he had sipped a little both times, but he objected strenuously to the opening of another bottle.

- "You are a savage old despot," cried Sophie, guilefully. "It's the same with all you men."
- "I don't think I am very much disposed to be tyrannical, Sophie; it is only that we have all had enough, and—"
- "You're afraid I might take too much. Isn't that it, Geoffrey? Well, perhaps you're right. But let us have one more glass—just one," pleaded Sophie.
- "No, really, my dear girl," answered Geoffrey, gently.
- "Your dear girl! Am I your dear girl, truly? Do you really like me, or am I a nuisance to you?"

"I do like you, of course, very much, Sophie," replied Geoffrey, cautiously.

"Don't say it in that way," said Sophie, looking at him with unmistakable tenderness. "Say I

like you-I love you."

"I like you—I love you," repeated Geoffrey, in her own impassioned tone. Then suddenly remembering himself and looking at his watch he jumped up.

"Good gracious, Sophie, it is very late. I must

be off and let you go to bed."

Sophie rose also, very unsteadily, and offered both her hands. She swayed for a moment and then fell forward in his arms. The suddenness of the collision threw him off his balance.

"Mrs. Sands, come, help me!" called out Geoffrey, as soon as he recovered presence of mind. "Sophie has fainted."

But Mrs. Sands made no answer. His eyes wandered about the room. The "governor" had disappeared, and he was left alone with the fair burden in his arms!

The wine was in, the wit was out. There was no doubt about it. Sophie Vernon, who had said to Geoffrey the very first time of their meeting, "I like wine," was now overcome by the copious goblets of champagne.

CHAPTER VI.

About this same time Geoffrey had other causes of anxiety. For more than a week he had been receiving doleful letters from his mother concerning the condition of his father's health, and the very next morning after his strange experience with Sophie, while his mind was racked by alarming anticipations as to the possible consequences, a dispatch from San Francisco, in care of his banker's, informed him that a change for the worse had occurred and bidding him be ready to start for California at any moment.

Then there was George Fenton, who for some time had been acting very strangely, leaving the house early in the morning and not returning until long after Geoffrey usually retired. George omitted his usual calls on Geoffrey before going to bed, and in every way seemed to shun the pleasant little chats, smokes and exchanges of confidence to which the young Californian had grown accustomed. What could be the matter with him?

To be suddenly deprived of the cheerful companionship just at a time when he needed advice and sympathy, he felt to be a sort of calamity.

But there seemed to be no help for it. Fenton, for some reason, did not wish to continue the old familiarity, and he could not force himself upon his friend's society under such circumstances.

He could think of no cause for Fenton's evident avoidance of him. George had often joined him in

his visits to the Vernon apartments, and he was rather inclined to think that the broker found great pleasure in those unceremonious calls upon the young actress. Nay, he had even suspected that George's feelings were a little stronger than his own toward Sophie. But all at once Fenton ceased his visits and pretended to be devoting himself more entirely to business. Could that be the real reason? He was quite aware that Fenton was in demand socially -that he was a welcome guest to many firesides, and that in the case of one very charming young lady of fashion he was regarded with something more than ordinary friendship. But George had always appeared to Geoffrey indifferent to the attention of young ladies, and only a little less demonstratively so in the case of this one in particular. Still, Geoffrey thought it possible there was more in the relations of Miss Ada Remsford and George Fenton than appeared on the surface. Perhaps the young lady had heard of Fenton's visits to the actress and had objected. Perhaps she had even blamed him - Geoffrey - for bringing together George and Sophie, and that was the reason of the changed manner of Fenton toward himself.

Geoffrey tried to concentrate his mind to a solution of the point, but Sophie's scene with him the night before kept obtruding itself on his memory.

Sophie Vernon intoxicated! Sophie in love with him! Mrs. Sands evidently bent upon making a match between them, too!

How well he remembered now the remark Sophie had made on the occasion of his meeting with her in the Pullman car:

[&]quot;I like wine, Mr. Smith."

Yes, it was but too evident she liked it, and not for her good.

Sophie, Fenton and his father's serious illness all at the same time! And how bitterly he regretted having quarreled with his father!

But that was through no fault of his own. Thank God for that!

It was that woman's fault—that accursed French woman who had wormed herself into his father's confidence and affection.

But as to Sophie, he had nothing but his own stupidity, blindness and obstinacy to thank for the trouble looming up in that quarter.

Marry her! How could he ever do so? What would his mother think of it, and his father, and —and—Kate? Yes, now he thought of Kate Fisher, whom he had not seen for so long a time. Geoffrey Sims married to an actress!

And yet, why not? He had stolen into the young girl's affections—robbed her of her peace of mind by his blind, persistent attentions, and how could he throw her off now? Would it be just? Would it be honorable? Would it not be cruel to do so?"

But a wife who loved liquor! The thought completely overwhelmed him.

Perhaps he could cure her!

"I will try, at least—I will make a great effort. She must promise me to give up wine forever." Geoffrey resolved, as he started for the actress's hotel toward noon.

The "governor" greeted him rather more effusively than usual, and in answer to his inquiry about Sophie, said:

"All right, Mr. Smith—at least she'll be all right in a short time. All she needs is to sleep it off."

Sleep it off! The expression staggered Geoffrey. The way Mrs. Sands used it implied that it was not the first time the sleeping-off remedy had been employed. "Can it be possible Sophie takes too much wine often?" he said to himself.

Mrs. Sands must have noticed some indication in Geoffrey's face of the pain and horror which he was suffering, for she added, quickly:

"You must make some allowance for her. You know the excitement she was under last night, and the cause of it. She is very sensitive on some points, and you must have hurt her very badly, indeed, to have upset her so completely. I never saw her before so thoroughly used up."

"She is asleep, then?" asked Geoffrey, in an absent way.

"I have just given her something to throw her into an easy sleep," replied Mrs. Sands. "She got up a short time ago with a bad headache, but I made her lie down again just before you came in."

Geoffrey stood up as if about to leave.

"Don't go yet," said Mrs. Sands, "for I want to speak with you. We may not have such another good chance soon again."

He sat down and waited.

"I am at your service, as a matter of course," said he. "What is it you have to say?"

"Sophie has only me to depend on, you know, Mr. Smith, and after what I said to you last night, and especially considering what occurred later on,

I think it is only right to—to—to—Oh! dear me, I don't know how to express what I want to say, but you must anticipate it, surely, Mr. Smith?"

Mrs. Sands cast an appealing look toward Geoffrey, who had grown very grave and serious, but

answered with apparent indifference:

"Indeed I do not anticipate it, Mrs. Sands. I would thank you to be more explicit."

"Well, then, to come to the point at once, it appears to me you two are behaving like a pair of babies. You are both in love and don't seem to realize it. I have known the state of Sophie's heart for sometime, and wondered if you, too, did not more than suspect the truth. Do you see?"

Geoffrey remained silent.

"Have you nothing to say?" asked Mrs. Sands, looking at Geoffrey with wonder. "You know, after what happened last night, things cannot go on as formerly without a clear understanding. Sophie betrayed the state of her heart, and you certainly displayed great feeling. I went out of the room for a few moments, leaving you both talking over some wine, and you know that on my return I found Sophie in your arms!"

Geoffrey had not suspected this interpretation of the scene, and he was so startled that he could not find words to repel it. Then in another moment, when he was calmer, he would not offer any explanation; he saw that whatever he might say would seem evasive—not sincere. Mrs. Sands watched him closely and waited for some expression on his part. He merely bowed his head and said:

"Go on, Mrs. Sands."

"There is not much more to be said by me. It is for you to speak, Mr. Smith. If you want my opinion, I will give it."

Geoffrey bowed again.

"Then I would say, that you should marry Sophie. There has been too much gossip about you and her already, and if the scene of last night had never occurred, some change would have been necessary. You would have had to propose, or cease your constant visiting. You know even actresses are not exempt from the laws that govern the relations of young gentlemen and young ladies."

Whatever Geoffrey might have contemplated saying in reply to the "governor's" serious comments was prevented by the sudden apparition of Sophie herself, standing on the threshold of her bedroom.

She was arrayed in a loose morning gown and looked pale and grave—quite a different being from the light, airy, thoughtless Sophie to whom he had been so long accustomed. Geoffrey stood up at once and hurried forward to greet her.

- "I overheard your voices in my room," observed Sophie, "and I could not wait to change my gown or make any toilet. I knew you would not mind, Geoffrey," said the young actress.
- "Certainly not," answered Geoffrey, who thought he had never seen her look so beautiful as at that moment.
- "I was in a hurry to apologize for my conduct last night. What must you have thought?" asked Sophie. "Tell me you forgive me, Geoffrey."

"I have nothing to forgive, Sophie. It is your-self you must consider, and—"

"Oh! don't sermonize me, anyhow," said Sophie, wearily. "It was all wrong—beastly wrong—no, I won't say that, for I know you don't like such common expressions. It was wrong and I am very sorry. There, will that do?"

"Yes, Sophie, I am glad to hear you say it. I came to scold you, like a brother, but your own confession renders it superfluous. You will resolve now, won't you, Sophie, to give up wine drinking altogether? It is not good for you, and the only way is never to touch it," answered Geoffrey.

"Then you think it was very bad, perhaps disgraceful, the way I acted last night," demanded

Sophie.

"The best way is to say no more about it, Sophie, but to profit by the experience. We are all apt to go wrong some time or other," Geoffrey said, very gently, for the subdued, penitent manner of the girl touched him deeply.

Mrs. Sands had slipped away during this dialogue.

Sophie had thrown herself on a sofa opposite where Geoffrey was sitting, hat and cane in hand, and she now appeared lost in thought, both hands clasping her head. Neither spoke for a few moments. Each had serious cause for reflection. Geoffrey, with the words of Mrs. Sands ringing in his ears, and with Sophie before him in that downcast, wearied, penitent mood, felt that the moment had arrived which was to decide his fate as well as hers. He could not doubt that the girl loved him; she had betrayed it but too plainly the night before;

and though his own feelings towar Sophie were very warm and affectionate, he was quite sure they were not of that deep, enduring nature a wife should expect from a husband. Still, he believed he was to blame. He should not have paid such marked attention to Miss Vernon, nor have exposed her to invidious comments by being seen so constantly in her company—at her hotel, in her walks, her rides, everywhere. He had been strangely blind to the possible complications such attentions might lead to.

Yes, there was only one course open to him—one way which would be honorable for himself as well as just to Sophie. He must offer to marry her.

"Sophie, do you think you would ever care to leave the stage?" asked Geoffrey, suddenly.

Apparently she did not hear the question, for she remained silent, lost in thought.

"Does your headache still, Sophie?" asked Geoffrey, approaching and taking her hand, which he found hot and feverish.

He raised her head, and then he noticed her tearful eyes.

- "What is the matter, Sophie? Come, you shall tell me."
- "I don't know. Everything seems changed to me to-day. Perhaps I am going to be ill," said Sophie, wearily. "I don't much care."
- "Don't speak that way, my dear girl. I don't like to hear it. Forget last night and cheer up. Let me see you smile in your old, happy way. That's it," said Geoffrey, "but banish those tears, too."

With his own handkerchief, Geoffrey dried the young girl's eyes, and then continued:

"Once you said that nothing would ever induce you to quit the stage. But you did not mean it literally, did you? At least, I don't believe you did, for I'm going to ask you to give up theaters and acting and to become my wife. Do you think you could love me enough to make such a sacrifice, Sophie?"

"Sacrifice!" repeated Sophie, "sacrifice! Geoffrey, be quite honest with me. Don't deceive me. Answer me truthfully. It is you who would make a sacrifice, is it not?"

"You have known me long enough to understand me, Sophie. You must realize how necessary you have become to me from the way I have pursued you since our first accidental meeting. Now, I will be quite frank with you, and admit that in asking you to become my wife there might be some sacrifices involved, but it is at present only a danger, and if you will aid me that danger need never become a reality," replied Geoffrey, evasively.

"Explain it, Geoffrey. I do love you and am ready to give up acting and everything for your sake, if you really desire it," said Sophie, eagerly. "Now tell me what you mean."

"I should want you to keep our marriage secret for awhile, that is all. To have it known might injure my prospects—your own future, Sophie. I have expectations which I cannot yet explain. That is the only condition which I might interpose, and even that would be for your own sake."

"Oh! Geoffrey, if that is all—if you really love me and would not be ashamed to take a poor actress as your wife—if——"

But Geoffrey's hand placed affectionately over her lips arrested her, while the other hand and arm stole around her waist and drew her toward him.

"Let us seal our engagement with a kiss, Sophie."

CHAPTER VII.

What was bothering George Fenton was the wild money market. It was in the month of September, 1869, and gold was rising while stocks were tumbling. The Street seemed to be under a spasm of lunacy. Everybody was crazy, and "Lucky George," as Fenton was called by his brother brokers, was feeling for the first time the unpleasant sensation of losing. He who had been so cautious and conservative, who never took great risks, who tried to avoid wild speculation, began to find himself at sea in all his calculations, and no better off than the most harum-scarum and reckless of the money gamblers.

A new thing under the sun had been discovered—a trick by which "a corner in gold" was brought about. Some big financial magnate, or unscrupulous clique, with millions to cast into the swirl of speculation, was disorganizing everything "on the Street," and thousands of blind speculators were ing swallowed up in the mad panic and disasters on sequent.

Geoffrey, however, had heard little about all this and understood less as he espied George Fenton approaching Mrs. Anderson's from the direction of Fifth avenue. Geoffrey had just parted with Sophie after proposing to her, and was longing to consult with some true friend, and who better than George Fenton could be found?

But such a changed appearance as the young broker presented—pale, anxious, haggard! In a moment Geoffrey forgot all about his own troubles and thought only of his friend.

"My dear George, what is the matter? Excuse my curiosity, but you look so depressed and unhappy that I cannot resist questioning. We have seen little of each other for some time, through no fault of mine. You have avoided me, I know. But now here we are again face to face, George, and you must let me share your trouble. Perhaps I can be of use to you, too—who knows, George? I am a useless sort of being, I feel; but at least my sympathy won't hurt, if I can't be of any service," said Geoffrey, in his warm, affectionate manner.

Fenton seized his hand, but shook his head in a despairing way.

"Come in and I will tell you," he answered; and when they had reached Geoffrey's parlor he broke out suddenly:

"The fact is, Geoffrey, I am on the verge of ruin. I have been caught at last. The market is crazy. There is no calculating five minutes ahead. I have lost and lost until I don't know where I stand or how to extricate myself from impending ruin. Everybody seems panic-stricken, and money

is not to be had except at such rates as are beyond my reach. This infernal gold speculation is pulling things to pieces."

- "Gold speculation?" repeated Geoffrey.
- "Yes, gold. It is all gold, gold, gold! which is mounting up in some mysterious way that baffles all calculations. They are making a 'corner' in gold—the Fisk clique. At present it is at 41; to-morrow it may be 100. Who can tell?" said Fenton, in a hoarse voice, and with a dead, heavy look.

Geoffrey only imperfectly understood at first, but succeeded after awhile in learning the main facts. It was his friend's belief that Fisk, backed by some powerful speculators, was determined to buy up all the gold possible and then trade on the necessities of the business people, from whom he could extort any price for possession of needful amounts of the precious metal for use in their ordinary transactions. This wild speculation in gold had depressed stocks and caused disastrous losses to many who had been obliged to carry large "blocks."

Geoffrey only indirectly saw the relation of the two things, but he understood clearly enough that if he could not save his friend from impending ruin, at least he could offer assistance.

"Look here, George! All this is too deep for me. But I have some gold on hand. You know I have always believed in sticking to the specie. A fellow knows what he really has then, in case anything happens. It's of no use to me just now, and if you think that one hundred and fifty thousand

dollars would enable you to pull through, say the word and it is yours," said Geoffrey.

"One hundred and fifty thousand! Are you serious? Why, it would be salvation," cried Fenton.

"Take it, then, old fellow, and use it. What's the use having it lying idle?" answered Geoffrey, in a generous burst.

"My God! is it possible?" cried Fenton, in amazement. "You will do that? You are not jesting?"

"Jesting! not a bit. I was never more serious in my life, and to prove it, here goes," replied Geoffrey, sitting down to a table and drawing up an order for the money, which he handed to Fenton. "There, old fellow. That does not look like joking, does it?"

Fenton seized Geoffrey's hands and wrung them feverishly. He was completely overcome with joy, and sank into a chair sobbing like a child.

"Excuse this weakness, Geoffrey. But I thought I was done for. The joy has now been so sudden—it knocks me worse than the despair. God bless you! Bless you again and again, for this unexpected aid. I feel like a shipwrecked sailor tossed about at the mercy of the storm who descries a sail and is rescued. Your money will be the turning point of my luck. I won't lose it, be sure. It will save me—enrich me—enrich us both. Before sundown to-morrow you will have cause to congratulate yourself on this timely help. Until then, good-by."

The excited young broker put Geoffrey's check

safely away in his wallet, buttoned up his coat and hurried out.

Geoffrey was alone again—at the most important crisis of his life with no one to consult.

He was dolefully pondering over his situation when another dispatch from his mother was handed to him, bidding him "Come at once. Lose not a moment."

With gloomy apprehension of the worst, he made all his preparations for leaving at once—on the next train—and then went to take leave of Sophie.

"A sudden resolution," remarked Mrs. Sands, when she heard Geoffrey's rather unsatisfactory declaration that he was called away suddenly to San Francisco.

Sophie turned slightly pale and held down her head for a few seconds before asking in a very low tone:

- "When will you return, Geoffrey?"
- "Not before a month, at least," was Geoffrey's answer.
- "Perhaps two months," ejaculated Mrs. Sands, in a dubious tone that irritated Geoffrey and Sophie. The "governor's" meddling was inopportune.
- "What a pity you are not already married—then you could go together," continued Mrs. Sands, as if only talking to herself.

Sophie flushed up angrily in an instant.

"Don't talk of such things, for Heaven's sake, 'governor'! Don't you understand Geoffrey must go away in a hurry?"

"Yes, yes-I know, of course. But I wasn't

going to say a word against it. I was only thinking what a pity everything was not already fixed. But I don't see why it cannot be done yet before he goes," persisted Mrs. Sands.

"Governor'!" exclaimed Sophie, desperately,

trying to stop her friend's tongue.

Geoffrey took the young girl's hand.

"Let her say her say, Sophie," said he, gently, though his mind was disturbed strangely by Mrs. Sands's rushing method.

"No, I won't allow it," replied Sophie, with

unwonted determination.

"Won't allow what, child? What do you suppose I am going to say, dear?" demanded Mrs. Sands.

"I don't care what you're going to say. Stop, 'governor,' I won't have it," cried Sophie, impetuously.

"Now, Sophie, be reasonable and listen to me. Hear what I have to propose before scolding—That's right, Mr. Smith," remarked Mrs. Sands, as she observed Geoffrey place his hand over Sophie's mouth to check her protests. "That's right, I'm glad you don't side with her in this matter. I'm only speaking in the interest of you both, and this is what I want to say. If you are going so soon, to-morrow morning, why can't you get married to-night? Then you can go together."

"Oh, 'governor'!" cried Sophie, in the deepest mortification, for Geoffrey had removed his hand from her mouth with a start. Her own hands quickly covered her face, which became scarlet; "I wish I had never seen you, Sands," she moaned.

"How can you say such a dreadful thing and place me in such a position!"

The tears forced their way through her delicate fingers, and dropped on Geoffrey's knee.

"Nothing could ever induce me to do such a thing, Sands," cried Sophie, hotly. "Geoffrey must go, and go alone. Do you think I am afraid to wait—that I want to hurry him, as if I doubted him? Oh, 'governor,' how could you do such a thing?"

Undoubtedly Mrs. Sands was moved by coarse suspicions insulting to Geoffrey's sincerity, but he was touched by Sophie's agitation and unselfishness and preferred to ignore the "governor's" too evident mistrustfulness.

"Sophie, there is much good sense in Mrs. Sands's suggestion. I see no reason why you should object to having the wedding take place before we part," said Geoffrey, in a quick way, as if afraid he could not trust his own speech. "We may as well have it over."

"Of course, I'm right. I'm always right," Mrs. Sands declared, confidently. "And you see how Mr. Smith agrees with me, Sophie."

CHAPTER VIII.

The famous Black Friday on which the great gold corner culminated is related to our story, because it was on that day Geoffrey and Sophie were quietly married (not the night before, as no clergyman could be found in time); and it was also memorable in the career of George Fenton as the lucky day on which he entered Wall Street with the cash supplied by Geoffrey and a few other friends, and left it richer by two hundred thousand dollars.

Neither Geoffrey nor Sophie thought of the Friday superstition, until they were in the clergyman's house, and then Sophie would have backed out altogether but for the "governor's" firmness.

"Nonsense, Sophie," cried Mrs Sands. "The idea of a girl like you giving way to mere superstitious gabble. Unlucky Friday! What absurd rubbish! One day is no better or no worse than another. You must have sense enough to know that, child."

"Well, it is not you who's going to be married, and it won't hurt you. But I don't like it, 'governor,' and I can't help feeling that this accident is an omen of ill luck. I prefer to put it off," said Sophie.

"Can it be possible you are so silly, child? Come, now, get ready and have it over. What would be really unlucky would be to leave without having it done, after coming here to be married,"

cried Mrs. Sands, not without some impression on Sophie.

Geoffrey uttered not a word, for, truth to say, he shared to some extent in the Friday superstition, and, besides, irresolution was working in him. In his heart he would have welcomed any decent excuse for deferring the wedding. In the stillness of the preceding night, as he lay tossing on his bed; all the doubts and misgivings he had at first felt rushed upon him again with a strength that almost overbore the chivalric resolution he had formed to marry the girl at whatever cost to himself. And he would have been but too well content had Sophie persisted in her opposition to Friday. But Mrs. Sands's last skillful stroke about ill luck attending postponed weddings made such an extraordinary impression on Sophie, that when she found Geoffrey apparently assenting by his silence she gave way and consented to have the ceremony go on.

The young actress clung to him very tenderly a few hours later when the time came for him to leave for California.

- "You are sure I have done right, Geoffrey?" she asked. "Are you quite pleased?"
- "My dear Sophie," cried Geoffrey, embracing her warmly. "How can you ask such a question? Is it not hard enough to leave you so soon without making the parting moment more trying by such questions?"
- "Oh! I hope you are sincere, Geoffrey—that you really love me—because—because I love you with my whole heart, and it would break were I

ever to know I have allowed you to do what you are going to repent of."

"Poor Sophie!" thought Geoffrey, as he was being whirled away in the train. "She is not happy, and I'm afraid that I have not gained even the satisfaction of making her contented by my own sacrifice. If she but knew what a miserable wretch I have been!"

"Now I'm happy, darling," exclaimed Mrs. Sands, when she and Sophie were back at their hotel. "Aren't you glad I bullied you, after all, you little simpleton? What a goose you would have been if I hadn't been at your side."

"I'm not at all satisfied with myself or you, either, Sands," replied Sophie, gloomily. "I wish we had waited. Nothing good can come of this unlucky wedding. You'll see."

"I'll see nothing of the kind, you stubborn little goosey," laughed Mrs. Sands, kissing Sophie again and again. "You two will be perfectly happy and bless me some day for forcing you into each other's arms. Come, cheer up, now, you ungrateful little bride, and let us forget all about gloom in celebrating the occasion. One glass of wine in honor of the day. Only one, Sophie. I suppose his royal highness, King Geoffrey, wouldn't object to it were he here."

Poor Sophie brightened up at the suggestion, and her spirits rose with the genial wine injudicious Mrs. Sands poured out for her. Well she knew "his royal highness" would have objected were he present, but like many another misguided and self-deluding woman she consoled herself

with the thought that Geoffrey would never know of it. Besides, "what real harm was there in it, anyhow?"

"Gone! and without settling with me!" exclaimed Fenton in astonishment, on reading the hasty note left by Geoffrey announcing his departure for San Francisco in obedience to "an urgent call."

"What a strange fellow he is! Thinks no more about one hundred and fifty thousand dollars than another would of one thousand dollars. Gave me the whole thing without receipt or condition. Trusted me completely, and now he flies off to California without a word about the money."

He read Geoffrey's brief but affectionate note again.

"I have heard of such people in the world, but never believed it till now. Wonder what the urgent call can be. No trouble, I hope. And yet, now that I think of it, seems to me he has been rather anxious-looking and worried. No use my trying to guess. He's gone, and that's all I know. Must wait till he chooses to tell me. Ah! but if I don't double that one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for him before he gets back, I'm a noodle."

George Fenton was in magnificent spirits again. He was out of the "slough of despond"—not only saved from ruin, but re-established as a capitalist and on the broad road to great wealth. Government had smashed the gold corner, and young Fenton nabbed up quickly as much of the hordes of depressed stocks as he could manage, to hold them for a rise, which was inevitable—a rise which

would make him and Geoffrey "solid forever," as he said.

"Ah, how near I was to ruin and how gallantly Geoffrey helped me! I can never forget him," he exclaimed aloud, "if I were to live a thousand years."

The idea suddenly occurred to Fenton that the actress over the way might be able to tell him more about Geoffrey's sudden departure.

"I'll run over and see them. A visit there always does me good. I like her, too—yes, I like her very much. I wonder if Geoffrey has any serious thoughts in that direction. Sometimes I fancy he has, and somehow the thought always depresses me. He's a noble fellow anyway, and Sophie is good as well as beautiful."

He crossed to the little hotel, took supper in the restaurant alone, and then went upstairs to the Vernon apartments.

When he knocked gently at the door of Miss Vernon's parlor, it was opened partially only and with some caution. Mrs. Sands's face, rather flushed and startled, presented itself.

"Oh! it is you, Mr. Fenton," said Mrs. Sands, in a tone that plainly expressed embarrassment. "Mrs.—I mean Miss Vernon is not well. But come in if you wish."

There was not much welcome in the invitation, and Fenton hesitated on the threshold in some embarrassment himself. A peculiarly strong odor of vinous exhalations came from the room, and his quick glance detected on the table two opened bottles and glasses, while on the sofa, partly cov-

ered by a large shawl, lay Sophie, apparently asleep.

"It is of no consequence, Mrs. Sands. I will call in the morning. I hope Miss Vernon will be quite well then," said Fenton.

Mrs. Sands bowed her head in assent.

"Good-night, Mrs. Sands, good-night," added Fenton. "I only wanted to know—"

The voice of Sophie interrupted him, saying:

"Don't be angry. Don't scold, Geoffrey. It won't happen again," reached his ears, as he turned to leave before Mrs. Sands had closed the door.

"That's decidedly strange," said Fenton, the gladness of whose face was suddenly changed to seriousness. "Talking about Geoffrey in her sleep. What was it she murmured? Something about forgiveness and never to do wrong again. Ah, me!" sighed the broker, descending the stairs slowly.

CHAPTER IX.

IT was not at all like going home with Geoffrey Sims this time. Always before he had been lighthearted and full of joy, but now his spirits were depressed and his mind harassed by different causes of anxiety. There was no doubting the tenor of the last dispatch he had received from his mother; it meant that there was no hope of his father's recovery, and perhaps he would not arrive in time to see him alive. He had parted from his father in bitter anger and indignation. Some months before his trip to New York, a French woman, neither particularly young nor good-looking, appeared in San Francisco, and made the acquaintance of his father. Until then, no one could have led a more honorable life than Mr. Sims. He was regarded as a model husband and father, gentle, considerate, loving and attentive. But with the advent of Mme. Vernay, his nature seemed to undergo a radical change, and soon all the world of San Francisco became aware that the level-headed old millionaire was permitting himself to be led astray by an artful and daring adventuress. Friends expostulated with him; but he told them to mind their own business.

"Can't a man see a lady on business without arousing the groundless suspicions of the gossips? I think I am able to take care of myself without impertinent meddlers," the millionaire had said,

whenever anybody spoke to him about the scandal his intimacy with Mme. Vernay was causing.

And there was just this one grain of truth in his statement: Mme. Vernay had, indeed, sought his advice about certain mining interests, and he had advised her judiciously. But consultations about such subjects could hardly be necessary at all hours of the day in her rooms as well as his office; and still less necessary appeared to be the frequent carriage rides alone with the woman, and their appearance together in cafés and theaters. But a man infatuated with a woman seldom sees these things in their true light, or, if he does, passion sweeps aside scruples, delicacy and other inconvenient considerations.

It often happens that a man's family is the last to suspect and the last to hear of the improprieties or suspicious indications. But Mrs. Sims, to whom until then her husband's whole life had been open as day—who rarely missed him from her side save when absent on business—could not but notice his frequent and unexplained absences now—his changed, fretful manner and aptness to take offense at the slightest exhibition of curiosity on her part.

Then there were not wanting spiteful, gossiping friends, whose hints were hardly needed to arouse her own suspicions. Something was wrong, and the whole truth flashed upon her one day when, by merest accident, she saw her husband and Mme. Vernay issue from the hotel together and enter a carriage. The French woman was leaning on Mr. Sims's arm and there was an expression in her eyes that meant a great deal to poor Mrs. Sims.

Geoffrey was with his mother at the time, taking an afternoon drive, and could not help noticing her extraordinary agitation, though he did not suspect the true cause.

"Are you ill, mother?" he said.

"Not at all," was her prompt answer, though her face was flushed and angry-looking. "I believe it is very warm."

That night there was a scene in the grand mansion of the Sims family on Mission street, caused by certain embarrassing questions asked by the wife of the husband, who from suspicious evasions easily passed to angry, contemptuous defiance, amounting to a confession of guilt.

"I decline to be catechized in this way. It is enough that I have told you I have certain business relations with the lady that I don't intend to explain. You must be contented with that reply," said the husband.

"Business with the lady!" repeated Mrs. Sims, with a peculiar inflection of the first and last word.

- "Well, and what have you to say against her? What do you mean by that curious tone?" demanded the husband, hotly. "Is she not a lady? Do you know anything to the contrary?"
 - "I know nothing about her, except---"
 - "Except what? Why don't you go on?"
- "Except that ladies do not go riding with other people's husbands. Concealment is useless longer, Geoffrey, for I have seen with my own eyes. And oh! that I should live to see it."
- "If, instead of talking riddles, you will explain what you mean, perhaps I will understand you, Mrs. Sims."

"Oh, Geoffrey, is it possible that it has come to this!"

"Again I tell you I don't know what you mean.
I see no reason for your tragic manner."

"We have always lived happily together until now, Geoffrey," said Mrs. Sims, with a choking voice, and scarcely able to restrain her tears. "For your own sake as well as for mine—and for our boy's sake—let no cause of unhappiness come between us. Think of your good name and of all the misery that must come upon us. We have loved and respected each other. Our life has been so free from misunderstandings, and God has been so good to us, Geoffrey. Must all be changed now for the sake of a stranger of whom you know little—who will only drag you down to degradation and then, perhaps, leave you when she has drawn from you all she desires? Think of the consequences—"

Mrs. Sims could proceed no further. Her voice broke and tears of anguish covered her cheeks.

Her husband stood for a few moments silently regarding her agitation, alternately pale and red with passion, but with no sign of relenting. Then he turned on his heel and left the room.

The months that followed this scene were full of anguish for the wife, who saw her appeal scorned, and suffered all the tortures of neglect and estrangement in silence. Mr. Sims scarcely spoke to his wife or son, took his meals alone, and spent as little of his time at home as possible.

Meantime, his son was greatly puzzled and distressed at the evident estrangement between his parents, and the hard, distant manner of his father toward himself. He was not conscious of having done aught to incur his father's displeasure, and every attempt he made to get an explanation was met with tears from his mother and unmerited harshness and rebuke from his father. The home that had been so happy and bright became gloomy and wretched.

The explanation finally came upon him like a thunder-clap. Of an impulsive, straightforward nature, he immediately resolved in rather an injudicious way to appeal to his father's better nature. It was a stormy interview, and young Geoffrey quitted his father's presence with such unusual words as "impertinent puppy," "meddlesome cub" and "audacious impudence" ringing in his ears.

"Never dare to speak to me on such a subject again, or I will—" Mr. Sims, Sr., had exclaimed with furious passion, checking himself on the verge of the threat, which trembled on his lips, of personal chastisement.

Poor Geoffrey was completely overwhelmed by the violence of his father's anger, and for some time could think of no other means to end the dreadful situation. To consult with his mother—even to let her know that he was aware of the shameful cause of the estrangement—seemed impossible. To again appeal to his father would be useless. He could only think, think, and fret in silence, without being able to devise any plan for dispelling the dark cloud that enveloped home.

At last the inspiration came to him. He resolved to go to the woman herself. She might be very bad indeed, but there must be some good left in her. He would arouse that good. He would

appeal to her to go away—far away from San Francisco, and thus be the means of restoring peace and happiness to the once happy home. No woman could resist the sort of appeal he would make.

But he little knew the artfulness and deceit of Mme. Vernay, who heard him with feigned astonishment and protested it was all "one grand mistake." Certainly she would not be the cause of trouble.

"Non, monsieur, jamais, mais—Ah! how must I go? How must I go from here because bad people say bad things? Mr. Sims is a gentleman—oh! one so honorable! It is an error, Mon Dieu! a grand error. But I must not have him for my business longer. No, it would not be right. Ah! then, but if people talk so, how can I stay? No, I see I must go. Mon Dieu, que tout-le monde est mechant. Ah! my dear young monsieur, I understand the—how do you say it?—the—the chagrin you have. But it shall stop, I will not be the cause. And madame votre mere—ah!—mais—"

Geoffrey was completely fooled. When he took leave of Mme. Vernay it was with an apology for having believed the ill reports of her. She seemed an admirable woman, and he felt convinced he had done not only a very good but a very wise thing. The trouble was as good as over. He felt happy and light-hearted, as he had not been for many months.

But the epilogue was to follow swiftly—for the very next day Geoffrey was summoned to the presence of his father only to be ordered out of it

again in a storm of passionate abuse and resentment.

"Out of my sight, you meddlesome young scoundrel! and let me never see you here again until I summon you! You presume to judge your father—to thrust yourself unbidden into matters you do not understand! How dare you have the effrontery?"

"But, father, hear me! let me ex-"

"Not a word, sir! I give you twenty-four hours to leave this house and go East. Go to New York. Stay there till I call you back. If I find you here at this time to-morrow—"

"But, sir-"

"Go! or I will not be responsible for my acts. Begone! or—Hear well what I now say. If you disobey me I will leave you and your mother forever. I forbid you to say one word."

Mr. Sims pointed sternly to the door, through which his son passed after exclaiming in a firm voice in which there were indignation and anger:

"I leave you, sir, but understand well I shall not abandon my mother in her distress. I cannot touch your heart and conscience, which seem to be dead now within you. But neither can you separate me from my mother without her consent, do or say what you may. God forgive you for the unjust words you have used toward me! God forgive you and change your heart."

"Ah, my poor boy, what you have suffered for my sake. But you must bear it patiently, Geoffrey. We must accept our burdens as they are sent by the Almighty. He will make all right and straight in His own good time. And—and—Geoffrey, it tears my heart to say it. But you must go away. You must obey your father," said Mrs. Sims, after listening to Geoffrey's account of the interview with his father.

"What! Leave you, mother! Never! Never!" exclaimed the son, firmly. "I will never quit your side while this wretched infatuation lasts."

"You must, my son. It is God's will," replied Mrs. Sims, in a voice trembling with emotion. "For you to defy your father will not help matters. It will only make bad worse. And—it is your duty to obey your father."

"Oh, mother, how can you urge me to do such a thing."

"Because I feel—I know it will be for the best. Your remaining will only intensify your father's anger, perhaps—Oh, Heaven, to think of it!—lead to violence between you. Think of that danger, my dear child, and the deeper disgrace and scandal that would result."

"Then you will come with me. We will go away together?" pleaded Geoffrey.

"No; my duty is to remain and abide God's will. My place must be near your father, and trust to Heaven for good results. Sooner or later the disenchantment will come, and then my presence will be useful. Leave all to God, Geoffrey."

"It would be wrong, cowardly, detestable, to leave you thus," exclaimed Geoffrey, impetuously. "I can't go—no, it is impossible, unless you go with me."

"My brave, good son," murmured the agitated mother, looking into her boy's eyes with tenderness and gratitude. "You are dearer to me now

than ever, because I see to the depth of your true, loving heart. But we must part for your good, for mine and even for his, my child. What you propose is out of the question. I must stay where I have promised God to abide, through weal or woe—at your father's side. You will understand that, I know. You must go alone—let us hope only for a short time. But I—I must stay here—wherever your father may be, for to abandon him now would be to leave him without help, support or restraint, completely under the influence of that bad, bold woman. You would not want her to triumph, and triumph she would were I to go away with you now. I have no fear. God will guard me, as I pray he may guard you among strangers."

"Mother, you are an angel," said Geoffrey, reverently. "I will go if you command me, of course. But have you thought how strange it will be—all the world here discussing father and that—that—devil, and I leaving at the same time?"

"Your remaining would be worse, my son, for an open quarrel between you and your father would ensue. It is hard to part with you, but God wills it, and we must bow to His will, Geoffrey. Go, then, with my blessing, and God be with you. We will make preparations at once. I feel that the separation will not be long. Be brave and hopeful, and take good care of yourself."

As he rattled ahead in the big overland train the recollection of all these unhappy occurrences came back to Geoffrey with extraordinary vividness. He recalled also words of advice his mother had given to him just before kissing him good-by for the last time. He had smiled at them then, but

how was it with him now? Had he heeded those words? Had he kept his promises to that good, pure, unselfish mother?

"I have only one fear in parting with you now, Geoffrey. That is the danger that lies in your soft heart. You are too easily touched, my son. You feel the troubles of others acutely and make them your own. You were so as a child even. It is a beautiful trait—noble and unselfish—but it has its dangers also, my son. Therefore I say to you, don't trust to your heart too much. Temptations will be thrown in your way when you are among strangers. Be on your guard always. Don't be impulsive or give way to your heart too easily without taking time to reflect."

"Trust me, mother, I will never act rashly. I premise you that."

"That's right, my darling son. You will write to me often, very often, no matter how pleasantly you may be occupied. Tell me of all your doings, your friends and all. Especially," added the mother, with a blush, "especially let me know about your lady friends. Oh! Geoffrey, don't smile at me for saying this. I ask you to promise never to commit yourself to any serious attachment without consulting me."

"You think I shall be captivated by some of the Eastern beauties, my dear little mother," Geoffrey replied, with a half-quizzical smile. "Don't worry about that. Whenever I find myself with the faintest matrimonial inclination, I shall sit down and pen you a description of the matchless beauty, her pedigree, rank and all that sort of thing." And it was thus they had parted at last with happy smiles instead of tears.

"And here I am going back to that good, pure sweet mother with deceit in my heart. Married, and married to an actress! How shall I ever tell her and my poor father whom I lectured? Ah! if I had only heeded her words in time."

CHAPTER X.

Mr. Sims, the elder, was dead and buried some days before his son Geoffrey could get to San Francisco. He had been suffering for over two years with a dangerous complaint, which demanded the greatest care to hold it in check. But in the ardor of his crazy infatuation for the French woman he threw cautions for health as well as for honor to the winds, and soon began to reap the disastrous consequences of sanitary neglect. To this was added the exasperating conviction that Mme. Vernay was only a cold-blooded adventuress, for he was too clear-sighted to remain for any great length of time blind to the fact that she only encouraged or tolerated him for the sake of the generous tokens of regard which from time to time he bestowed upon her. The day came when he felt he would like to be rid of her. Then the enormity of his trangression, the villainy of his conduct toward wife and son, the utter selfishness of his course, the depth of degradation to which he had permitted himself to fall—all seemed so terribly inexcusable and criminal that reparation appeared

impossible. In the darkness of his own soul, had he been left alone, he might have ended his career by suicide. But he was not left alone. His wife proved to be a true guardian angel. Few women, spurned and insulted as she had been, would have shown her angelic disposition to forget and forgive at the first sign of repentance. She understood her husband's nature too well to wait to be sued for pardon. She loved him too deeply, too unselfishly, to allow pride or resentment to hold her back for one moment. With intense gratitude to the Almighty for hearing her prayers - prayers night and day for the rescue of her deluded husband-Mrs. Sims devoted all her energies of mind and heart to his mental and bodily restoration. But it was too late. The old gentleman had gone a few steps too far, and it was written in the Book of Fate that he should pay the penalty.

"Oh! my darling wife, what a villain I have been!" he exclaimed one day as he lay on his bed of pain and repentance. "To have forsaken you for such a jade! To have wronged you even in thought, my darling—you, who were always so true and loving and devoted! How could you ever forgive me?"

"Hush—Geoffrey—hush, dear! You will only injure yourself and delay your recovery," answered the good wife, kissing his fevered brow.

"That will never be, my darling—never. I am not to survive this attack. I feel it. I know it. Don't deceive yourself, or try to deceive me. It is useless," said Mr. Sims, sadly, "I wish I were more fit to go, darling—more worthy of your sweet, consoling love, and of God's great mercy."

"Oh! Geoffrey, don't speak in that way, as though all hope was over. You will break my heart. God will spare you, be sure. Hope. Don't despair," said Mrs. Sims, kneeling at his bedside and bathing with her tears his trembling hand.

"God's will be done, my wife," murmured the dying man. "God's will be done. If I could only see our boy once again—to ask his pardon, too—my poor boy, whom I spurned from me. Oh, God! Oh, God!"

It was his frequent cry—to see the absent one—a cry that was not to be answered, for the supreme moment came even sooner than he himself expected.

"Tell Geff I always loved him, even in my madness, and ask him to pray sometimes for me. Farewell, darling. God bless and protect you! God bless you and him. Farewell!"

They were the last words of the millionaire, who passed calmly away a moment after.

Young Geoffrey on reaching home found his mother almost at death's door from grief and physical exhaustion. At her side was a young lady, watching over her tenderly as a daughter. He did not immediately recognize in the tall, slim, dark-eyed girl the playmate of his childhood, Kate Fisher, whom he had last seen in short dresses with hair plaited behind and tied with ribbon. She was then only ten years old, a gay, light-hearted, romping little miss, who had been his constant companion in all his boyish sports, until each was sent away to be educated—the girl to a convent, and the boy to a college in New York. For awhile they corresponded, keeping alive the memories of

childhood's happy days. But after a year the correspondence almost ceased, and as Geoffrey seldom visited home, even during his vacations, it happened that they never saw each other again until the death of his father called him back to San Francisco. It was a great surprise, therefore, to find his little Tomboy companion of other days transformed into a beautiful and accomplished woman. It was a disagreeable surprise, too, when he realized that the former intimacy was no longer to be thought of—that his little "wifey and sweetheart," as he used to call her, had become the distant if not proud young lady, protected by the dignity of womanhood from the familiarity of youth.

And—bitter thought, which he realized too late—there was a barrier created by himself which made impossible the sweeter tie of mutual confidence and affection once so eagerly hoped for.

"What a wonderful change! How beautiful she had grown! Yes, how very beautiful and dignified!" thought Geoffrey with a sigh, after the first greeting, when he had sat down by his mother's side.

He certainly had not been cold in his greeting to Kate Fisher, though he felt he had been awkward and half shy, and imagined by her manner that in some way he had disappointed her. Was it possible, he asked himself, that she expected more warmth, or was it that he had not met her expectations—that he had not grown up as she had pictured him to herself he would be after all the years of separation? Geoffrey longed also to woo back and to know a little of the happy freedom

of yo th—but he could find no words to suit him when alone with her occasionally. They were together days and weeks in the sick chamber of her whom both loved as a mother, but somehow they never seemed to grow in intimacy, as naturally should have happened under such favoring circumstances. Why was it? Kate was pleasant enough with him in the presence of his mother, but let them by chance meet each other alone, anywhere in the grand mansion, a chilly reserve on her part appeared to be assumed expressly to prevent anything like the old free intercourse.

One morning as the two sat alone at breakfast Geoffrey observed:

- "It must be delightful to you, Kate, to see the splendid result of your devoted nursing of mother. She is growing quite strong again. In a few days more she will be well enough to go away, and the sooner she leaves here the better it will be for her health and spirits. Don't you think so?"
- "Certainly, Geoffrey. Change of scene is the best medicine, no doubt," answered Kate.
- "Change will improve you also, Kate—change and rest. You have given yourself so wholly to watching and nursing mother, that I wonder you have been able to endure it. I declare I don't know what might have happened but for your presence here when mother fell sick. Do you know, when I saw you at mother's side I did not recognize you at first. You can have no idea, of course, yourself, how you have changed in years. Perhaps you would not have remembered me, either, if you had not known I was coming—if you—"

"I would have recognized you any place, Geoffrey," said Kate, slightly coloring.

"Oh! you think so," remarked Geoffrey.

"I am sure," answered Kate. "There is some change in you, certainly, but it is not so much in your personal appearance as in your—your—"

"What?" demanded Geoffrey, who thought there was something like rebuke in the young lady's tone.

"I could not explain, I'm afraid," answered Kate.

"I wonder if it is not a case of mutual mistake?" asked Geoffrey. "You imagine changes in me that don't exist, just as I was imagining—I hope it was only imagination—that you had grown very distant, formal and cold with your old playmate. We used to be like brother and sister, you know."

Miss Kate Fisher making no response, Geoffrey was puzzled to understand whether she meant silence as assent, or the very opposite.

"That's a bewildering, way you have now, Kate. I might say it is sometimes exasperating to get only silence as an answer," said Geoffrey, who thought he had gone as far as he ought to go in search of an explanation, and now felt decidedly piqued. "I might say that, I repeat, but of course I have no right to complain if, for some reason I can't understand, I am disagreeable in your eyes."

"Now, Geoffrey, isn't that rushing very absurdly to a conclusion? Why should you be disagreeable in my eyes? What have I said or done from which you can reasonably draw such an in-

ference? Is it because I can't find answer ready for all your questions?"

"Ah, Kate, your own words now show you are not frank and free with me. But don't let me annoy you. I won't here you any more with trouble-some questions."

And Geoffrey took refuge in silence until Kate, having finished her breakfast, was about to retire. Then he said:

"I intended to consult you about something before our conversation took such a sudden turn just now, Kate."

"Indeed! On what subject?" asked Kate, turning her beautiful black eyes full upon the young man with an expression of curiosity and surprise.

"First let me ask you, Kate, if you have any preference yourself regarding places. I mean when mother is strong enough to leave here, is there any particular place you would prefer? I am sure it will not matter much to mother, and it would please us both to leave the selection to you, Kate."

"That is very kind in you, Geoffrey," answered Kate, "and I am very thankful for your thoughtfulness. But I have no choice. Wherever you and mother wish to go will satisfy me perfectly."

Kate's answer was decidedly less cold than usual, and Geoffrey thought she looked really pleased.

"Ah! but I sha'n't be able to go, Kate. I must leave mother entirely to you. I am obliged to get back to New York just as soon as mother is comfortably settled."

"You are-going-back-to New York?"

There was something of startled surprise in her way of putting the question, and Geoffrey thought there was annoyance or regret expressed in her eyes.

"Yes, Kate, there are some matters there demanding my attention just as soon as I can get

away," said he, very calmly.

"Oh! it is business. I didn't know you troubled yourself about such things," said Kate. "If it is only business it won't keep you very long."

Geoffrey colored a little at the thought of deceiving Kate.

"Indeed, it is something of the very highest importance, Kate, or you may be sure I would not leave you. I mean, of course, I would not put all the trouble on your shoulders by leaving the entire care of mother to you;" Geoffrey hastened to explain.

- "It is no trouble, Geoffrey. I don't like you to say such things to me, or to think them. Your mother, of course, will miss you, but as she must know about the important matter that calls you away, she will not complain," answered Kate.
- "Oh! I have not bothered mother in that way, Kate, and I have no intention of doing so."
- "Why do you say bother, Geoffrey? Whatever is of importance to you must concern her, too, and could not bother her."
- "Oh! well, Kate, you know she is not strong enough yet. We must do and say nothing to her that might cause worry."

"Worry, Geoffrey! I hope your business is not of that nature."

Geoffrey had not looked for such close questioning, and sustained it ill. He felt the blood flushing his face, and knew he was displaying a suspicious embarrassment. The next remark was not well calculated to allay suspicion.

"My business, Kate, concerns another as well as myself, and for that reason I cannot explain it."

"Pardon my impertinent curiosity. I had no right to question you," said Kate, resuming her cold, distant manner.

"I am afraid it is I who have given offense, Kate. Your questions were most proper and natural."

The young lady made no response to this conciliatory speech, and Geoffrey could not read by her face what might be passing in her mind.

"You don't answer, Kate. At least say whether I have offended you or not. You don't know how that silent habit you assume so often pains and worries me. It makes me think I have offended you, though Heaven knows nothing is further from my thoughts. Won't you answer me, Kate?"

There was something in his pleading tone that touched Kate's sympathetic heart.

"You are mistaken, Geoffrey. You don't offend me. Why should I be angry with you because you don't feel at liberty to tell me about your troubles, if you have any? I might feel sorry, not angry."

"That is more like your old self, Kate," said Geoffrey, taking her hand, which he found a little tremulous in his own. "Let me say this before you go now, my dear little sister, to show you I trust and would confide in you more fully if I could. I cannot tell mother even about the business that calls me to New York. It is something that gives me great anxiety—even unhappiness."

"Oh, Geoffrey!" exclaimed Kate, in whose eyes there sparkled a few dew-drops. "How sorry I am! Forgive my—my—imprudence, and be sure of my sympathy always."

"Thank you, dear Kate—a thousand times," exclaimed Geoffrey, pressing her hand gratefully. "Your sympathy will always lighten any trouble that may come to me. Oh, my God!"

The cry suddenly escaped from him, as he dropped her hand and left her there alone, standing by the breakfast-table. Her eyes followed him as he rushed into the garden through the open stained glass door and disappeared. Her face showed pain and surprise. Her heart beat furiously.

"What can it mean? What secret is it he would conceal? That strange exclamation! His look of anguish! His sudden rushing away!"

Kate Fisher sank into a chair again, and rested her head on her hands for a moment in thought. When she raised her head again there were tears in her eyes.

"Poor fellow!" she murmured. "I knew there was something wrong with him. And I cannot help him—not even know his trouble."

Over the mantlepiece there was an oil painting, representing a little girl and boy. The girl was curled up on a large wicker chair, smiling at the boy, who stood at her side with one hand about her

neck and the other patting the head of a big Irish setter. It was Geoffrey and herself, aged respectively ten and eight.

"I trusted him then," murmured Kate, when her eyes rested on the picture recalling so tenderly the happy days of childhood. "Why must I doubt him now? And yet something tells me he is not the same—that this secret trouble, whatever it is, must be something that will part us, perhaps forever."

The tears flowed faster as she gazed at the familiar picture.

"How silly I am, crying like a baby about what I don't understand—crying when I ought to be trying to comfort him. I will trust you, Geoffrey, Yes, I will, until I know some reason why I should not, and then, at least, I can do something to make life happier for you."

The girl rose resolutely, wiped away all traces of tears, and went out into the garden where she saw Geoffrey sitting on a bench on the very spot where they had so often nestled side by side in the happy innocence of youth. His hands were clasped behind his head. His back was toward her, so that he could not observe her approach, and she glided so lightly to the spot that her hand was on his shoulder before he had an intimation of her presence. At her gentle touch he turned quickly and rose to his feet.

The look of anguish in his pale face sent a pang to her heart.

"Geff! dear Geff! forgive me. I came here to tell you how sorry I feel that you have any trouble—how eager I am to sympathize with you, andand—yes, Geff, and tell you that I trust you just as much as I did when we were little ones together."

"Kate, Kate! I am unworthy of your confidence. Oh, my God! my God!" burst from his

lips, involuntarily.

"Oh! Geoffrey, don't speak so. You don't know what you are saying. I see you are grieved. That is all I want to know. Don't say anything more now. If it is any comfort for you to know it, be sure I shall always be your friend—your dear sister."

"You are an angel, Kate. I said too much, perhaps. Forget it. Forget me, too, if you can."

"Oh! I wish I could comfort you—do anything to make you feel happier!" murmured Kate, with tears in her eyes. "I have been so hard with you, too, all this time, but only because—believe me, Geoffrey, I thought you had changed."

"Changed! so I have. I'm a fool, an idiot,

a---''

"Hush! hush! Oh! don't speak so, Geff. Don't.
It wrings my heart to hear you."

"And now I am aking you, too, wretched like myself. Don't cry, Kate. Don't, darling. I can't bear it. There, dry your eyes. I will say no more. Don't mind me. Go to mother. Go to her, and leave me to recover my——"

He had taken her hand and felt its warm, loving pressure, which sent a chill of rapture through his whole being. In a moment he forgot everything but Kate. He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it tenderly, passionately. Then suddenly remembering himself, he cried:

"My God! What am I doing? Betraying how

I love you—you—only you, Kate, and I have no right to do so. Leave me. Don't trust me. Hate me. I am more deserving of your hate than your love."

Her hand was released, but she stood a moment contemplating him in amazement.

"Geoffrey, I don't know what you mean. But no matter what you say, I will always trust you and sympathize with you."

She turned and re-entered the house with Geoffrey's "God bless you, my darling," filling her heart as well as ears.

CHAPTER XI.

GEOFFREY and Kate had both seen Mrs. Sims on that eventful morning before meeting at the breakfast-table. They had found her bright and cheerful, and their salutations had been received with a happy smile.

"I feel so much stronger, so much happier, today, my children. It is as if a new lease of life had come to me."

Her cheerful words gladdened their hearts.

When they had gone down to the breakfast-room, Mrs. Sims summoned her own maid and had herself dressed, for the first time since her sickness, without waiting for Kate Fisher's assistance. She wanted to surprise her Kate and her Geoffrey, and had the homely old rocking-chair—one of the relics of less properous days—drawn over by the window from which she could look down on the garden. She

loved all the old pieces of furniture that had served her and her lamented husband in their humble home before fortune had made them so wealthy. In her sleeping-room she still preserved a mahogany bureau, two comfortable old rocking-chairs and the desk which she had bought for her husband out of her own savings when first they arrived in this country. She clung fondly to these relics, that contrasted so strongly with the costly and fresh articles to be seen in every other part of the Sims mansion. And yet there was no room in the house that had such an air of comfort and simple refinement, for the grand new things which were to be seen there also-in deference to her husband's wishes-had been chosen with such good taste as to harmonize perfectly with the old.

It was with a sweet sigh of contentment that she sank into the old rocking-chair on this particular morning and looked down on the beautiful garden, from which ascended the delicious perfume of scores of blooming plants.

"How astonished they will be to find me here," she murmured to her maid. "Don't let them know I am up and dressed. I want them to be surprised."

Presently she saw Geoffrey rush into the garden.

"Poor boy! He loves the fresh air and I have kept him so much confined lately. But now it is all ended. I am well again, and there is no more need of this wearisome watching and nursing," she thought. "God be praised."

Her eyes followed Geoffrey's quick movements and she smiled happily as she murmured:

"What ferocious exercise! He wants to make up for lost time. A mere boy in heart, as natural and simple-minded as before he left for New York, and I was so nervous about him, fearing that he would be contaminated or spoiled by the artificial life there!"

She continued to watch her son until he sat down on the bench. Soon her attention was attracted again to the garden. Kate had appeared, walking toward the spot where Geoffrey sat.

"What a nice couple!" was her delighted exclamation. "How handsome both have grown, and how admirably suited to each other, if they only knew it. Ah! if Geoffrey would only take a fancy to Kate! But he seems so indifferent in that way, and Kate, too, never appears to dream of the possibility of Geoffrey falling in love with her! The effect of their bringing up-more like sister and brother than strangers. And yet they used to be so fond of each other, that, foolish mother as I must have been, I used to think they would surely make a match when the proper time came. Ah! well, who can tell? Mothers never should make matches for their children. That is, when they are so young. Bless me, what is that? He has her hand, and-yes-really-he is kissing it, and not very much like a brother either. Oh! thank God! The dearest wish of my heart is to be realized."

She could not see Geoffrey's face very well where she sat, or she might have noticed there an expression that would have sadly spoiled the delightful series of visions her imagination was forming. But she could see distinctly Kate's

flushed face, as Kate herself hastily retraced her steps toward the house.

Not long after, when Kate entered Mrs. Sims's apartment, she was struck by something unusually soft and affectionate in the old lady's voice and manner.

"My darling, I have been waiting for you so long this morning," said Mrs. Sims, smiling with a new sort of expression.

"Oh! mother, I am so delighted to see you there—and looking so strong and happy. I have been neglectful this morning, I am afraid," answered Kate, embracing Mrs. Sims warmly.

"Not at all, my love. Look at the clock. You will see it is not yet my usual hour for rising. I wanted to have a surprise for you and Geoffrey. Where is he? Why is he not here, too?" inquired Mrs. Sims, archly.

The young girl felt the blood rushing to face and neck. It seemed to her that Mrs. Sims must be reading her very soul. Why was Mrs. Sims regarding her so intently? What was the meaning of that unusual expression?

"My darling, come here to me," said Mrs. Sims, sweetly.

Kate sank on her knees before the old lady, in whose lap she hid her face.

"Tell me why you are so unusually excited this morning, my love," continued Mrs. Sims, rubbing the silken black waves of hair softly and lovingly. "Is it from pleasure—some new pleasure, darling, or is it from pain?"

Kate could not utter a word. The contrast between the mother's serene contentment and Geof-

frey's heartbroken, despairing manner a few monents before was too much for her. It needed all her force of will to refrain from breaking into a fit of weeping. The happy old lady mistook the agitation and trembling for evidences of that new joy, which could find no words for expression.

"Ah! my darling, I think I could guess if I tried hard. But never mind, dear. Don't hide your head. Look up at me—at your mother—and let me see your eyes. Am I not your mother now?"

The response sounded something like a sob at first, when Kate, half raising her head, murmured:

"You are the only mother I have ever known, and I love you with all my heart."

"There, there, darling. Don't say any more. I won't tease you further," said Mrs. Sims, tenderly. "You are extraordinarily sensitive, Kate. But, really, this boy of mine is tardy to-day. What can he be doing—of what thinking—to forget me this morning? Kate, ring the bell there."

Hastily wiping her eyes to hide, if possible, all traces of tears, Kate obediently rose.

"Tell Mr. Geoffrey to come at once," said Mrs. Sims, when the maid appeared.

"He went out in haste, ma'am, after reading his letters," answered the maid.

"Gone out? Well, I declare, everything is upside down this morning," observed Mrs. Sims, with a smile. "Something must be going to happen."

"The doctor is downstairs, ma'am," said the maid.

"I will see him at once. Bring him here," replied the old lady.

Kate Fisher took occasion to slip out, as the doctor entered, and ran to her own room.

Meanwhile Geoffrey had, as stated by the maid, received his letters and gone out in haste. Rushed out, the girl might have said with truth, for among the letters was one from Sophie and another from George Fenton which intensified the high excitement he was already enduring. Sophie's was rambling, if not incoherent, and legible with difficulty. The studied caution of Fenton's only caused Geoffrey to read it with more attention. Before he perused one-half of it he rushed from the house as if fearing someone would see the deep excitement by which he was shaken. And yet the alarming passages in Fenton's letter did not seem to justify so much agitation.

"I don't know that I have any right," Fenton wrote, "to meddle, but there is some mystery in the Vernon-Sands household with which your name is linked, in some way, judging by various hints that the 'governor' has dropped occasionally, when her tongue has been loosened by generous wine-juice. Twice when I called I found Miss Sophie quite ill, and on each of these occasions Mrs. Sands, being, as I stated, rather artifically excited, let fall some expressions that astonished me. I can make nothing of them—they were too mystic—and might mean many things—if they mean anything beyond irresponsible gabble. But one thing struck me forcibly, and I only write it to you because I feel that, like myself, you take a

purely unselfish interest in our friend, Miss Sophie. Mrs. Sands is not a safe custodian for a girl of Miss Vernon's soft nature, and if I had half the influence over the young lady that you seemed to possess—you know she treated you with the confidence and respect of a big brother—I would advise Miss Sophie to find a new and more discreet 'guide, philosopher and friend' than Mrs. Sands."

Mild and cautious as these few sentences were to Geoffrey they conveyed a startling picture which the chivalry of his friend had tried to suppress. "Miss Sophie quite ill." Alas! he knew too well what that illness meant, coupled as it was with the frank admission about Mrs. Sands's "artificial excitement."

Even the servants noticed their young master's worn and haggard looks, both when he hastily quitted the mansion and when he re-entered it very late in the afternoon. It had always been his habit to nod kindly to the servants, whenever he passed them—to say some pleasant words to each. But now when he returned he passed through the hall silently without bestowing any greeting—apparently without noticing anybody—and proceeded direct to his mother's room.

The dim light as he entered the apartment hid from her view the distress written on his face, though he was struggling to appear as calm and cheerful as usual. But Kate Fisher saw it all with an acute pang.

The cheery voice of Mrs. Sims roused the girl, and she resolved to do all in her own power to shield Geoffrey.

"Well, Sir Truant, where have you been wandering ever since morning, and I so anxious to see you—to speak with you about the doctor's recommendations?" asked Mrs. Sims after Geoffrey had kissed her.

"And what is it the doctor recommends that I am expected to consider, dear mother?" asked Geoffrey, in a grave tone.

"Nothing which should make you so solemn, Geff," answered Mrs. Sims, whose ears had detected something in her son's voice that sounded like anxiety. "You must not be so easily frightened. He has not told me anything alarming—only this—that I ought to leave as soon as possible for Europe and pass the Winter in the South of France."

"Europe—France!" echoed Geoffrey, in a less solemn tone. The suggestion brought some comfort to his tortured mind.

"Yes, my son, and I am glad you seem to approve of it," answered Mrs. Sims.

"I am sure whatever the doctor advises will be for the best," replied Geoffrey.

"It will be a pleasant change for us all, no doubt, Geoffrey. You and Kate will profit by it even more than I," continued Mrs. Sims.

Kate noticed the start of surprise and the painful embarrassment of Geoffrey at this announcement.

"I—am—that is—I will—I mean when does the doctor wish you to go?" asked the young man, holding down his head.

"Oh! I suppose we are not expected to pack up and leave in any very great hurry," said Kate, who desired to help Geoffrey out of his embarrassment.

"I am glad of that," observed Geoffrey, "for I want to go over to New York again, and at once."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Sims, looking up quickly. "What is there to cause such haste?"

"Something of too much importance to neglect any longer," answered Geoffrey.

"And you have been neglecting some important business, then? Your poor father used to manage all that by correspondence, Geoffrey. Why cannot you do the same, my son?" demanded Mrs. Sims, mournfully.

"Because it is nothing like what you suppose, mother—not business at all, but something that concerns another, which I cannot now explain to you, dear mother."

"I am very sorry to hear that, Geoffrey, because the something of which you speak happens rather inopportunely. Kate was wrong. The doctor does advise haste, and of course I counted upon your company and your aid. But you know best, my son. If you have to go, we must only wait. That is all."

Geoffrey had recovered his ordinary calmness by this time, and allayed the alarmed curiosity of his mother by saying:

"My trip to New York need not delay your departure, dear mother. All the preparations can go on, and if I cannot get through in time to conduct you from here, we can all meet in New York and sail from there."

"Oh! we will not need Geff in getting ready, mother," Kate hurried to explain. "He would

only be in our way. "We'll manage all right, I'm sure."

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Sims, in the manner of one who assents without agreeing. "But we must not interfere with Geoffrey's plans, whether or no. Let it be as you wish, Geoffrey, and God speed you."

"Thank you, dear mother. You don't know how it pains me to have to leave you at such a moment, but it is really a case of necessity."

"When will you start?" asked Mrs. Sims.

"To-morrow. Letters received since morning warn me to lose no time."

"I need no assurance to believe you, Geoffrey, but it is alarming to listen to you talking in that way. I can think of no interest to call you there in such a way. I hope it means nothing disagreeable for yourself. Now I see you more distinctly, you have a worried and unhappy look, my son. What can be the matter?"

The mother's sudden anxiety disconcerted Geoffrey for a moment. He held down his head without answering, and Mrs. Sims turned quickly to Kate.

- "Do you know anything about this, my child? Does it mean any disaster, or— Oh! no, I cannot think it possible," said Mrs. Sims, looking from one to the other anxiously.
- "Of course, I know as little as yourself, mother," murmured Kate, in a rather hesitating voice.
 - "You and Geoffrey have not quarreled-or-"
- "No, mother," exclaimed Geoffrey, with somewhat startling emphasis. "We two could never

quarrel. What could ever cause a disagreement between us?"

"Nothing, I hope, my son," said Mrs. Sims, who felt greatly relieved by Geoffrey's emphatic denial. "It was a foolish question to ask, and yet for a second I did imagine—that is, there did seem to me that probably there might exist a reason for misunderstanding."

She was thinking, of course, of the morning's scene in the garden, and wondering if she could have misunderstood its import. If Geoffrey had, as she supposed, declared his love to Kate, why was he hurrying away so precipitately to New York? What could be of superior importance to him than to be near Kate and herself? Why did he look so troubled, and why was Kate, too, apparently not eager for him to remain? It was all out of the usual course, certainly, and she would like an explanation of the curious contradictory symptoms, but as neither Kate nor her son thought proper to speak, how could she venture to interfere?

It was hard to remain silent, but still harder to say outright what was in her mind. She did the very best thing for all three under the circumstances. She showed no further anxiety and concealed her perplexities from both Kate and Geoffrey.

CHAPTER XII.

GEOFFREY did not make his appearance at breakfast next morning, and Kate Fisher believed it was because he wished to avoid another interview with her alone. It deepened the mystery of his strange and wholly unexpected outburst of the preceding day. She could not understand why he had almost in the same breath declared passionate love and then asked her to forget what he had said-even to forget him altogether, if she could. Ah! how impossible that would be after learning from his own lips that he loved her. Before that moment she had believed he cared for her only in a mild, brotherly way—that their early pledges of enduring affection were regarded by him as childish play, only to be considered, like other sports of youth, as pleasant memories. He had seemed indifferent, even, at times, which hurt her womanly pride and made her strive to dissemble her own deep feelings. How hard it would be to dissemble any longer? She dreaded the inevitable leave-taking. She did not feel sufficiently certain of her own strength of will to be confident of the result. What would he say? What would he do? Perhaps he would go without seeing her at all. He might believe it best not to meet again until-until he came back from New York.

She trembled at the very thought. To leave her like a mere stranger, without seeing her again, how could she endure it? And yet while she trembled at this thought, the idea of meeting him again alone appeared equally terrible.

A thousand times she asked herself why he seemed to think it a sort of crime to love her. And each time she shrank from the only logical answer that would come. The fear was fluttering about her heart, that to learn the truth would be the death-knell of hope.

She was standing by that stained-glass door through which Geoffrey had passed the day before into the garden. Her mind was recalling every word and look of his during their exciting interview, when all at once she became conscious he was at her side. Her heart seemed to cease its beating, for a moment, as she listened in painful suspense for the sound of his voice.

"Kate, I have come to ask your pardon for my strange conduct yesterday."

She did not move; her tongue seemed paralyzed.

"Is it possible you will not even speak to me, Kate? Have I then offended you so much?" he asked in a tone of deepest misery.

Her lips moved, while her eyes turned to his.

- "Dear brother," were the words that came from the trembling lips.
- "Bless you, Kate, for those consoling words, which tell me you do not hate but pity me. In a moment of mad forgetfulness, yesterday, I said to you what I had no right to say, and I came here to ask you to forgive me before leaving you—"

"Oh! Geoffrey, I am so sorry-"

"I want you always to believe this, dear Kate—no matter what you may hear, no matter how hard appearances may bear against me—that I

have done only what honor demanded of me. The time may come when, not knowing all the circumstances, you may think I only deserve your scorn

"Oh! Geoffrey, tell me no more. I cannot bear to hear it. I will never despise or hate you-never, Geoffrey, never. I am sure you have done nothing you need be ashamed of. That is enough for me. I have no wish to hear more from you now. Wait until it becomes necessary—wait."

"Wait!" echoed Geoffrey. "Yes, Heavenhelp me, that is all that is left for me. A long, weary, despairing wait, and, in the end, what?"

"I cannot understand your words, Geoffrey-I do not wish to. Let us speak no more about thisthis sad business of yours, whatever it is. It only increases your own pain and does me no good," murmured the young girl, mournfully. "I hope, whatever may be your trouble now, all may come right soon."

"Thank you, Kate; thank you. One more word before we part. If it can do you no good, at least it will relieve me to say it. If anything should happen-you know one never can tell in this world -to prevent us from meeting again soon, I want you to understand that I have never changedthat I have always preserved the same affection and—I always shall."

His voice trembled, and there was in it something like a note of despair, that frightened the young girl even more than his strange, ominous words.

"If we should not meet again-soon! If, Geoffrey-if? Oh! what can you mean? Is there, then, some terrible danger? Are you not hiding from us something that we ought to know? Oh! Geoffrey, I implore you don't go—don't, if, as I cannot but fear, from your words, this is a fare. well, not merely the beginning of separation for a few weeks. Geoffrey, Geoffrey, can it be possible?"

"No, Kate, no. It is not so bad as that. But I will tell you, what I dare not say frankly to mother as yet—that there is a possibility I may not be able to accompany you abroad—even to see you again before you sail. I do not know myself about—"

He stopped abruptly and ran toward Kate, who had suddenly become pale as death. Her hand was pressed against her heart as if in agony.

"What! what is it, Kate? Are you ill? Have I frightened you? My God, what have I done?" cried Geoffrey, taking one of her cold hands.

"It is—nothing—only a momentary weakness. Let me rest here a minute," she answered feebly as she sank into a chair, with Geoffrey leaning over her. He had become almost pale as herself.

"Is—this—business so imperative that you must go?" she asked, with difficulty finding the words.

"Absolutely imperative."

"And-your name-your honor-demand it?"

"Yes, Kate—yes."

"Then, Geoffrey, go, in God's name, and—do—your—duty."

Her firmness seemed restored in an instant. She spoke resolutely, with no trace of weakness in voice or manner, and Geoffrey, who had feared she was about to faint, contemplated her with amazement. How strange, he thought, that she should

remind him of duty—she whom that very duty seemed to wrong most deeply!

"I will try to do my duty, certainly, all the more resolutely, Kate, since you bid me make the effort," said Geoffrey, who felt himself restrained and awed by the change that had come over her. It was as if a goddess had spoken and commanded. "I will not weary you longer with my troubles, about which I ought not to have spoken without telling you all. But be sure, dear Kate, your advice and sympathy are my chief consolation and will sustain me, in the discharge of what you have rightly called my duty. Good-by," added Geoffrey, pressing her hand gratefully and respectfully.

But she seemed neither to hear nor heed; her eyes remained fixed on the ground.

- "I'm going now, Kate—leaving for New York. Do you understand me?"
- "Yes," murmured the young lady, almost in a whisper.
 - "Good-by," repeated Geoffrey.
- "Farewell, Geoffrey, farewell," said Kate, gently withdrawing her hand from his warm clasp and smiling a sad adieu.

She was still sitting in the same position, absorbed in her own thoughts, motionless, when Mrs. Sims appeared at the breakfast-room door. She had descended the stairs leaning on her son's arm, and had just taken leave of him. The sad, troubled look on the young girl's face made her pause on the threshold a moment.

"My darling child, what is troubling you?" exclaimed the warm-hearted lady, forgetting her

own worries at the spectacle of Kate's silent grief. "Won't you confide in me? Let me share your troubles?"

She had lightly stepped to Kate's side, and placing one hand around her neck, had drawn the young girl's head lovingly toward her.

"Come, tell me, darling. You know you can trust me," continued Mrs. Sims, in a voice full of tender interest.

But Kate Fisher's only response was to seize Mrs. Sims's other hand and press it to her lips, covering it with the hot tears that, at last, flowed freely, spite of all efforts to restrain them.

"My poor child, if I could only comfort you!" said Mrs. Sims, sinking on her knees by the agi-

tated girl and caressing her fondly.

"You are sad, my child, at Geoffrey's departure. Isn't that it? Come, darling, let us confess to each other. He loves you. You love him. What is there so terrible in that fact? He will return soon, or we will follow him soon, and all be together again, Cheer up, darling, and answer me. It is time, is it not? I confess I have hoped and suspected it for some time, but yesterday something occurred that convinced me. Tell me now with your own lips. Look up and speak to me. Make me happy, darling, by owning that the dearest wish of my heart is to be realized."

"I am sorry-oh! so sorry!-for I would do anything in my power to make you happy-but -that-can-never be," replied the weeping girl, raising her eyes with a despairing look. "It is impossible."

"Impossible!" repeated Mrs. Sims. "Impossible, child! How can that be? Does not Geoffrey love you-did he not ask you to be his wife? Can I have been so grievously mistaken?"

The girl's agitation became painful. She could

only wring her hands and weep.

"I am sure he loves you-sure of it, darling, but perhaps you do not-"

"I can never realize your dream-it is impos-

sible," sobbed Kate.

"God's will be done, my child. Love is something that cannot be forced. I shall never try to influence your heart in that way-not even for Geoffrey's sake," said Mrs. Sims, mournfully. "But what, then, causes your violent agitation? Let me try to comfort you, at least."

"Not even you, dearest and best of mothers, can help me. And—oh! believe me—I am sorry we -that is, I cannot make you happy in the way you mean," cried Kate, impulsively throwing her arms about the neck of the noble woman at her feet and kissing her tenderly. "But you must not remain there—in that attitude," added Kate, rising suddenly and forcing Mrs. Sims into the chair, while she herself knelt and buried her face in the good lady's lap.

"Tell me one thing, my darling, freely and frankly-do you love anybody else?" asked Mrs. Sims, bravely determining to hear the worst at once.

"No one-no one," answered Kate, in a tone that sent a thrill of joy to her listener's heart.

"Thank God for that!" she could not help exclaiming. "All may yet come right in good time."

She kissed the girl, embraced her again and again, and wept tears of joy.

But when alone afterward in her own apartment Mrs. Sims remembered her promise to Kate's dying mother to love and cherish the girl like her own child. Mrs. Fisher had been her dearest friend, and before her death had begged Mrs. Sims to take care of the little orphan.

"She has no relations to look after her welfare, and without your protection and care may fall into the hands of bad people, more eager to control her money than to guard her true interests. You will take my darling, won't you?" the dying mother had asked.

"I will love and cherish the little darling as my own," Mrs. Sims had unhesitatingly declared, and well had she kept the sacred promise.

But now she asked herself: "Am I doing right in cherishing this hope of a union between Kate and Geoffrey? If she does not feel able to reciprocate his love, I must not try to influence her mind and heart. No, no—that would be wrong. I would be unfaithful to my trust."

And the noble-minded lady resolved to commit the future of the two young beings, in whom her heart was wrapped up, to the guidance of the Almighty. Being a profoundly religious woman, she mentally exclaimed: "To thy care, Almighty God, I commit them. Thy will be done."

CHAPTER XIII.

MEANWHILE our young millionaire was being whirled to New York, his mind racked by conflicting thoughts. Kate had commanded him to do his "duty," and the word was still ringing in his ears. Hard, bitter word now, and hard, bitter fate before him. Yes, whether the suspicion roused by Fenton's note should prove true or not.

"The harder the better for me," he thought.
"If it comes to the worst, duty's obligations will be the more imperative. I shall have to struggle with greater energy. There will be no time for vain regrets."

Then the next moment he despised himself for the thought.

"What! have I become so base! Do I actually wish poor Sophie to disgrace herself in order that I may have no time to think—no time to dream of what might have been? Is that your idea of duty, Geoffrey? What a vile wretch Kate would think you, if she but knew your secret thoughts!"

No, he would do his duty manfully. But what a future to contemplate. Either a perpetual struggle to keep a wife from dissipation, and in such a degrading form—or a life of secret regret because he had married one who could never be as a real wife to him, never as a daughter to his mother, and whom Kate would only pity or despise. Would she not even despise himself?

"Perhaps-perhaps. But still I will do my

duty. Yes, I shall at least deserve Kate's respect and love, if I cannot keep them."

The nearer he got to New York the stronger grew his good resolution, save in one respect. He had reasoned himself into the determination that one of the first things he would do after seeing his wife would be to write to his mother a full and free confession. "I owe it to mother and to Kate, as well as to Sophie, to make this acknowledgment public and private," he had said to himself, time and again, on the train. But on the eve of his arrival he was not so sure that would be wise—in fact, his courage was greatly weakened. He was completely undecided what he would do.

He had not warned Fenton of his coming, and when he reached his old bachelor quarters his friend was not there. He had hoped to see George Fenton before going to Sophie. A half-formed resolution to tell the whole truth to his friend had thus induced him to defer his visit to Sophie; but when he found George out, there was nothing left for him but to go at once to his wife.

"My wife!" thought Geoffrey. "How strange it seems to me now! Married for over six months, and I am already ashamed—afraid to visit my wife."

With a heart beating wildly, he knocked at Sophie's door and turned the handle nervously, when the words, "Come in," in the well-known voice of the "goyernor," reached his ears.

"Geoffrey Smith!" exclaimed Mrs. Sands, in something like affright, as he crossed the threshold. The look, the tone of her voice, sent a chill to his heart.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Sands? My arrival seems to alarm you. Is anything wrong? How is Sophie? Where is she?" asked Geoffrey.

She is quite ill—asleep there in her room. I would not disturb her just now," answered Mrs. Sands, nervously.

Geoffrey sat down with a load on his heart. The fear that Sophie was there—in the next room—in one of her fits of intoxication, paralyzed his tongue. He could not ask the question that struggled to his lips. Mrs. Sands noticed his emotion, but mistook the cause.

"She will be all right in an hour or so. Let her sleep, Geoffrey. It is something that sleep will cure better than anything else," she said. "There is nothing serious the matter. You need not feel alarmed. If you come back in a few hours she will be all right."

Without uttering a word, Geoffrey stood up and left, to the amazement of Mrs. Sands, who half suspected then he had guessed the truth. She shrugged her shoulder as he disappeared down the stairway and muttered to herself:

"It can't be helped, anyway. If I kept him here, he would be sure to learn at once. It is better for him to be out of the way for awhile."

The next half-hour Geoffrey spent in his own apartments in a state of mind bordering on despair. The horror of his position overwhelmed him. All his good resolutions were shattered. He felt like fleeing from New York and from Sophie forever. Only a conviction that such a course would precipitate an exposure restrained him form departing at

once, without waiting to have his suspicions confirmed by an interview with his wife.

How could he meet Sophie that day with his mind in such a whirl? How could he bear an interview with her after so long an absence, when he knew she would be only recovering from the stupor of alcoholic indulgence? He felt unequal to the task, and sat down to write her a brief note telling her he was going out of town, but would call on her next day, when a noise on the stairs arrested his pen, and he stood up with horror in his face and nervously watching the door.

"I tell you I must see him, and I will," were the words that assailed his ears. It was Sophie's voice, and the words sent a chill to his heart.

He strode irresolutely toward the door, and opened it just in time to receive Sophie in his arms as she tottered forward.

"Oh, Geoffrey!—Geoffrey!—I'm so glad you are back," murmured Sophie, in a broken voice. The servant who had vainly endeavored to prevent her assent paused for a moment in astonishment, and only retreated at Groffrey's silent command to close the door.

"Sophie! Sophie! this is a sad way to meet you again. How could you do this, Sophie? How could you?" gasped Geoffrey, in mingled disgust and pity.

The arms tightened about his neck and Sophie's only response, at first, was convulsive sobs and tears.

"I know, Geoffrey—I know what you are thinking of. It's beastly—beastly," she cried, at last

finding words. "But I couldn't help it—I could not, indeed, Geoffrey."

And she rambled on in maudlin excuses, which only revealed more clearly her helpless, irrational state.

Reproaches would have been useless under the circumstances, and Geoffrey listened to her patiently and gently, until the flood of self-abuse exhausted itself. After awhile she calmed down, became quiet, unwound her arms from his neck and with bowed head, murmured:

"You never can forgive me, Geoffrey—never—never?"

"Yes, I can and do, Sophie, but on two conditions, which you are hardly in a state to fully comprehend at present," said Geoffrey.

"What are they? I will comply with any conditions. Name them," replied Sophie, with a sudden display of firmness and determination.

"The first is that you come away with me this very night—away from New York at once. You must leave Mrs. Sands and come with me," said Geoffrey.

"Oh! will you take me? Will you forgive me, then?" pleaded Sophie, in a voice that went to his heart.

"Of course, Sophie. A husband should forgive and overlook much. You are now my wife and must follow me. We will leave here to-night. I will go with you, now, to the hotel, where you can get ready. The other condition is that you promise me you will never touch liquor again without my consent."

"I promise. Ah! I promise and I will keep

it," sobbed Sophie. "Trust me in future. I will disgrace neither you nor myself."

Geoffrey's only response was to open his arms, embrace the weak, penitent wife and kiss her for the first time since their re-meeting.

When George Fenton reached his quarters late in the evening, he found the following brief note awaiting him:

DEAR GEORGE—I arrived here four hours ago from California. Sorry I did not meet you, as I had much and important to say.

Am off again on a brief tour with my wife. Yes, George, it will surprise you to learn I am married, and to whom. But for the present it is to be a great secret. I know I can trust you. When I add that my wife is Sophie, you will understand my reason for secrecy, and why I go away so suddenly. I will let you know my address, and perhaps if I require your friendly advice you will not find it onerous to come to me.

Yours sincerely, G. S.

The note fell from Fenton's hands. His face had suddenly become pale.

"Well, it's all over. I hope they will be happy, and I will do all in my power to help them to be so. Yes, everything. But what a strange life it is! Mrs. Sands's mystery has been solved."

He picked up the note and burned it.

"Well, is it not better, after all, than what I half suspected? Yes, it is all for the best."

CHAPTER XIV.

GEORGE FENTON, for fully two weeks after Geoffrey's sudden arrival and departure, wore a graver look than usual. His friends observed him in the streets with his fine head of hair covered by the easy-fitting hat he always carried. This was regarded as an evidence of absent-mindedness, for when at his best, free from care or anxiety, Fenton, as previously explained, was remarkable for his bareheadedness; his hat was then nearly always in his left hand and an umbrella in his right. Many a smile and good-natured criticism this eccentric habit of the broker occasioned. On this particular morning George Fenton was walking down Fifth avenue abstractedly, looking neither to the right nor left, and unheeding the many pleasant smiles cast toward him. His attention was all at once aroused, or rather forced, by two ladies standing in his path. Mrs. Adlai Remsford it was-with her daughter, Miss Adawho thus confronted the broker.

"Upon my word, Mr. Fenton, you are growing blind, or you wish to cut your old acquaintances," remarked the elder lady. "Which is it?"

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Remsford. Good-morning, Miss Ada," answered Fenton. "I was thinking of something that quite absorbed all my attention, or I would have been more observant. I am delighted to meet you, ladies."

His hat was now in his hand, and the fine head of hair in evidence.

"You look very grave," next observed Mrs. Remsford. "I hope the world is using you well; no bad news, Mr. Fenton, I trust?"

"Thank you; no."

"Ada thought you must have some kind of trouble—you looked so solemn and preoccupied," returned the old lady, glancing at her daughter, who at the moment seemed intent upon drawing some mysterious signs, with the end of her parasol, on the sidewalk. She made no reply, and Mrs. Remsford continued:

"But I need not tell you we did not bar your passage in the public streets to satisfy any idle curiosity. You have become such a rare visitor that we were glad to meet you even here—"

The young lady—a pretty little brunette—now look d up quickly and spoke:

- "Not to occupy your precious time too much, the simple fact is this, Mrs. Geoffrey Sims has arrived——"
- "Mrs. Sims!" cried Fenton, with sudden interest.
 - "Yes, Mrs. Sims has come from Califor-"
- "Oh!" interrupted Fenton. "From California
 —I see. For a moment I supposed—"

He checked himself suddenly.

- "Supposed what?" asked the young lady in some astonishment.
- "I supposed—that is to say, I imagined—oh! well, it's of no consequence—only a foolish idea that flashed through my mind. Of course you mean his mother has come."

- "Certainly. Of whom else could we be speaking? There is only one Mrs. Sims, I believe, unless Mr. Geoffrey himself has a wife," observed the elder lady.
- "Of course—of course," said Fenton, quickly, at the same time turning and walking beside the ladies. "You will allow me to accompany you a few blocks? You were saying Geoffrey's mother has arrived."
- "Exactly," returned Mrs. Remsford. "She and I are old friends, you know, and as you are Geoffrey's closest associate, we thought Mrs. Sims would like to make your acquaintance. Can you dine with us to-night? I suppose you can tell her all about Geoffrey's movements. It seems he has been here and gone off somewhere again."
- "Yes, I knew he had been here and left again in a great hurry; but I'm afraid I can give no information as to his movements. I did not even see him."
- "Indeed!" remarked Miss Ada. "That's strange."
- "But you will come, will you not?" asked Mrs. Remsford. "We may expect you to-night?"
- "Certainly, with great pleasure," replied Fenton, though Miss Ada saw no evidence of extraordinary delight in his manner of acceptance, which she attributed to a reason far from the true one.
- "His mother expected to meet Mr. Geoffrey here on her arrival; he was to accompany her abroad. But now all she knows of his movements is that some horrid business has compelled him to go to Canada somewhere, and it seems he will not

be back here in time to sail with his mother and half-sister," Mrs. Remsford explained.

"Half-sister! I never heard him speak of any sister," said Fenton, with some show of interest.

"Miss Fisher is neither sister nor half-sister," said Miss Ada. "She is in no way related by blood. Miss Fisher is an adopted daughter."

"Oh, indeed!" said Fenton. "This is all news to me. You see I am not half so well informed about Geoffrey as yourself."

"A most delightful young lady she is, toovery beautiful, but so composed and almost sadlooking," Mrs. Remsford added.

"I will go with real pleasure, and I thank you both very much for the invitation. It will be a privilege to know his mother and his—sister."

Miss Ada thought there was something genuine in his manner of acceptance this time, and again in her own mind discovered a wrong cause for it. "It is the sad-looking sister he wishes to meet," she said to herself with a little sigh.

"And now, ladies, I will occupy your time no longer. Expect me at—what hour shall I come?" asked Fenton.

"Six this evening. Good-by, Mr. Fenton."

"Good-by."

He bowed and turned, resuming his walk down-townward. When they looked back, after a few moments, they saw him, hat in hand, striding along in his old fashion.

"We took him out of his melancholy mood evidently," observed Mrs. Remsford, smiling. "What an odd habit that is, carrying his hat in his hand!

He is a strange young man, but very delightful in spite of his eccentricity."

Miss Ada looked annoyed, but said nothing.

When six o'clock arrived Fenton made his appearance, radiant in a faultless dress suit, at the Remsford residence on Fifth avenue. No trace of his solemn mood remained. He was at his best, all smiles and full of small talk, so precious to the ears of ladies, young and old.

He was received by Miss Ada with more cordiality than in the morning. The young lady was quick to observe the changed mood of her visitor and delighted to find him more affable and talkative than he had been for some time. She was arrayed in a most becoming gown of daffodil silk draped over soie de Chine of the same delicate tint; the waist, an odd little jacket of mouse-colored velvet trimmed with bands of gold galon. A girdle of galon also encircled her waist. Altogether it was a costume well calculated to set off her good points very successfully. She was indeed very attractive, though quite petite.

Fenton's admiration for the beautiful forced from him admiring glances that made the young girl's heart bound with pleasure.

"You are more like your old self than you have been for a long time, Mr. Fenton," she observed, pulling a little rose from the rich bouquet fastened to her corsage. "Let me adorn you with a boutonnière, since you have come unprovided."

She stepped toward him and reached for the appropriate buttonhole in the lapel of his coat, but

it was too high for her, and she laughed with a pretty embarrassment.

"I did not suppose you were so tall," she said.

"I have never been regarded as a giant," he replied, stooping and assuming a semi-kneeling posture. "But here goes. Now you can fix it."

Miss Ada fluttered somewhat, and occupied rather more time in arranging the flower than would have been the case had she been less nervous and excited. But at last she pinned it dexterously.

"There, that looks better," she murmured;

"now you're a young man of the period."

"Many thanks, Miss Ada, for the pretty gift," he responded, with genuine pleasure. "It is a beautiful rose and——"

"Well? And what? Why don't you finish the sentence by saying one of the pretty things young gentlemen of the period always say to young ladies under the circumstances?" she asked, archly, and with a little touch of tenderness in her voice.

"Because I'm afraid I'm not one of the conventional sort," said he, slowly.

"Do you mean to say you never flatter, and that you have no vanity?" she asked, with a shade of disappointment.

"It would not have been flattery had I said what was on the point of my tongue, which is an answer to the first part of your question; and as to the second part, I suppose I have my own share of masculine vanity."

"Ah! you're always ready to acknowledge your own infirmities. I must admit that much," said Miss Ada, completely restored to good humor by the delicate compliment implied in Fenton's reticence. "But I should like to know what the unflattering thing was. What was it you were about to say?"

"Nothing unflattering, be sure, Miss Ada."

"Then tell me," she pleaded.

But at this point what threatened to be a sentimental tête-à-tête was interrupted by the advent of Mrs. Remsford, followed by Mrs. Sims and Miss Fisher and Mr. Remsford himself. After the formalities of introduction, he found himself monopolized by Mrs. Sims, the two young ladies chattering together apart. He found no difficulty in evading troublesome questions from Geoffrey's mother, who, though so anxious to learn something about her son's mysterious business, never for a moment suspected Fenton of suppression or prevarication. She was quite charmed by his manners, and found great comfort in the fact that her son had chosen such an entirely proper and well-informed companion, as his closest friend, in the city of great temptations.

The company was small, Mr. Remsford and Fenton being the only gentlemen present. The dinner was served on a round table, and Fenton found himself between the two Remsford ladies. Miss Fisher was at the left of the host in such a position that Fenton could study her refined face ad libitum without appearing to do so.

"To-night we are en famille," said Mrs. Remsford; "entirely so. You see we make no stranger of you."

"It is delightful to think so," said Fenton, modestly. "One likes so much to feel at home."

At such a table there is little chance for tête-à-têtes. The conversation of one must be for all, and yet Miss Ada found means of conveying little side remarks to Fenton, unheard by the rest of the company. Fenton did not appear to observe the confidential tones of the young lady, though at times and unconsciously his responses were almost as confidential and subdued as her own. Miss Ada was delighted and felt she had at last awakened a sympathetic chord in the young broker's heart.

As to Fenton himself, the one thing that chiefly impressed him was the quiet, lady-like reserve of Miss Fisher. "Yes, it was quite true what Mrs. Remsford had said this morning. There is a strain of sadness somewhere in that lovely face. I wonder what can have caused it? Singular, Geoffrey never chanced to mention this beautiful creature. I should so like to have a little tête-à-tête with her."

Such were Fenton's musings, and before the pleasant evening came to a close the opportunity to exchange with her a few words apart from the rest was afforded him. He observed her standing alone by a little table, looking over the pages of an autograph album.

"Are you fond of autograph collections?" he asked, approaching her.

The book closed with a suddenness that made the young man suspect Miss Fisher desired to conceal whatever she might have been reading. The impression was deepened when he noticed the flush on her face, as she turned toward him.

"I hope I have not interrupted you, Miss Fisher," he remarked, rather bunglingly betray-

ing his observation of the young lady's embarrassment.

"Not in the least, Mr. Fenton. I am very glad to have a few moments of your time," she answered, sweetly. "You are Geoffrey's good friend, and I am very glad to be interrupted."

"He never told me about you, Miss Fisher. I think I have cause to complain about him on that

score," said Fenton.

"That was quite natural. He had not seen me for many years when he left San Francisco, and he did not even know I had returned to his mother's care when you met him in New York."

"Ah! that puts another aspect on the matter. I thought it was rather odd, you know," remarked

Fenton.

"Does he often come here? I suppose he has been a frequent visitor at this house?"

Fenton noticed that while she spoke her eyes rested on the album, and he could not help connecting the autograph book, somehow, with the question.

"Yes, this house is one of the few where Geoffrey and I always found it pleasant to come," he answered.

"She is very beautiful. I mean Miss Remsford. Don't you think so?" asked the young lady, with a little catch in her throat.

"Yes, indeed, I heartily echo that sentiment," returned Fenton. His words were certainly warm, but there was no genuine enthusiasm in his voice.

"I don't wonder Geoffrey admired her so much," said Miss Fisher.

Fenton was somewhat surprised at this re-

mark. He could not remember that Geoffrey had ever shown conspicuous admiration for the pretty little brunette. He would like to have asked Miss Fisher why she had made such a remark, but just then Mr. Remsford approached and carried off Kate for a game of chess she had promised. When he observed the two fairly seated at the game, he turned over the leaves of the album until he came to a page on which Geoffrey had written a few lines complimentary of Miss Ada's beauty and amiability.

"Dear me! dear me! can this be the cause?" said he, as a new idea shot through his mind. "Geoffrey, Geoffrey, you have made a great mistake, I fear. What sad pranks so-called Fate plays at times! Ah! well it is too late for both of us now."

His fingers remained on the lines Geoffrey had written months before, when Miss Ada appeared at Fenton's side. She noticed in a moment where Fenton's fingers lay, and the absent, rather sad expression on his face. It gave her an exquisite thrill of joy. "George is jealous of Geoffrey," was her quick conclusion.

"You have always deferred writing something in my autograph album, Mr. Fenton," she observed, sweetly. "I won't permit it any longer. You must—you really must to-night. Write some thing now."

She handed him a pen.

"I don't think I could do justice to the subject to-night. Postpone it till my next visit. Then I will come primed, ready to write the handsomest sort of things."

Miss Ada was not a bit put out by the refusal. Quite the contrary. She imputed it to a tinge of jealousy on his part—jealousy caused by the lines written by Geoffrey Sims.

"This is delightful," she thought to herself. Then aloud she added: "Well, if you won't, you won't, Mr. Fenton. I can't force you. But remember you are not to beg off next time."

When Fenton took his departure Mrs. Remsford noticed that he had again become solemnlooking. So did Miss Ada; but not with the heart-sore feeling with which she had observed it before.

"Now I know the cause," she said, "and I am happy."

George Fenton when he took her hand to say "good-night" was almost sure he felt a little pressure different from any he had ever before received from a young lady.

And it did not make him feel happier.

CHAPTER XV.

After waiting two weeks in the hope that Geoffrey would join them, Mrs. Sims and Kate sailed away alone, without even the consolation of being able to bid him good-by, save by letter. But his promise to follow them soon was, at least, something, and helped to soften his mother's deep disappointment. To George Fenton—who, of course, did his very best to supply Geoffrey's absence—the old lady said, just before the steamer departed:

"I feel you are a true friend to my son, Mr. Fenton. Be his friend always. I hope this business is nothing serious, but I am sure you will always be a safe guide to him should he ever need guidance. Urge him to follow us quickly, and if you can accompany him yourself, so much the better, dear Mr. Fenton. We will be delighted to see you. Good-by, and God bless you."

"Dear old lady," thought George. "I wonder how long she will have to wait for Geoffrey's business to end—how long before 'sister Kate' will be gladdened by his presence. Ah! what a sad, sad business it is, all the way through."

In truth, it was a good six months before even George himself again met Geoffrey, and a long, weary year before the son, so earnestly longed for, joined his mother in Europe. She was in Spain with Kate at the time. To Geoffrey himself it seemed strange that no questions were asked him

about the mysterious business important enough to cause such a long separation. Was this through Kate's contrivance—by Kate, who, in some way had induced his mother to betray no curiosity on the subject—never, in fact, to refer to it? He believed it must be due to her thoughtful considerateness. Of one thing he was sure: she did detect the signs, hard as he tried to conceal them from all the world, of the secret anguish he was suffering. Her manner toward him was touchingly delicate, partaking of more than a mother's solicitude and a sister's gentle tenderness. She seemed to divine the kind of silent, unspoken sympathy that was good for him—to know instinctively always the best way to make their intercourse easy and unrestrained without seeking or repelling confidences. Indeed, after awhile he did not even try to hide the fact that he was a prey to secret and harassing anxieties. It was a great comfort to him to be able to throw off the mask in her presence—to feel he was in no danger of prying curiosity from her knowledge of his troubled state of mind. When she thought he preferred silence, she remained quietly in his presence, plying her needle in some feminine work or contentedly looking over some book. When he seemed eager to talk, she was full of all sorts of pretty devices to enable him to drown care in temporary forgetfulness.

Her unerring instinct made her at times more than half guess the cause of Geoffrey's grief, but she recoiled from it whenever it obtruded itself. There was a woman in the case, she was certain, though it was not Ada Remsford, as she had at one time—only for a little while, however—supposed. "Time will tell—time will tell," she always ended by exclaiming. "Perhaps the reality may not be so terrible as I suppose."

So they traveled on and on, until finally they left Europe from a Spanish port, intending before returning to the States to visit the West Indies, Mexico and perhaps South America. Mrs. Sims had a longing to see her San Francisco home again, but so long as Kate and Geoffrey wished to remain abroad, she would utter no word of dissent. Their pleasure and happiness were her law, and she noted with pleasure that Geoffrey always assented at once to any plan proposed by Kate. The relations of the two puzzled her. She could find no key to the explanation.

It was at the end of two years that the little party reached Mexico—the capital itself—after a few pleasant weeks in the tierras calientes. To Mrs. Sims and Kate it was old Spain again with Indian variations, but variations of the deepest interest, and the refined young lady seemed to admire even the half-civilized Aztecs in all their dirt and squalor. "They are picturesque," she would exclaim—"the most picturesque people we have met in all our travels."

It was here, in the capital of Mexico, that she persuaded Geoffrey finally to treat her to a bull-fight exhibition. There was to be a display by amateurs for some charitable purpose and all the fashionable world was to behold the exhibition of skill to be made by a band of young swells who yearned to emulate the daring performances of professionals. So Geoffrey secured a box and invited many American friends to share it with him.

His mother would not go, but in her place went several ladies to keep Kate in good countenance.

"I don't suppose there will be much bloodletting anyhow," Geoffrey said to himself. "These amateurs, I fancy, will only serve up a little comedy that will make Kate laugh."

The scene of the intended exploits was an immense coliseo close by the Paseo de Reforma, Mexico's most fashionable drive and promenade ground. When Geoffrey, with Kate and the rest of their party, entered the immense wooden structure, every seat, as well as every inch of standing-room in *Sol and Sombra, was taken. The boxes were filled with elegantly dressed ladies, young and old, frightfully powdered and painted, attended by husbands, brothers and beaus, whose eyes sparkled with a sort of fierce expectancy of the bloody pleasures soon to be enjoyed. Even the ladies displayed some of this fierce exaltation, many of whom Geoffrey had met before, and whose subdued, modest deportment in their own homes had invested them, in his eyes, with a peculiar charm. How was it possible, he asked himself, that such refined ladies could find pleasure in the barbarous sports of the bull-ring? He could not understand it, and-much as he loved and respected Kate-he could not quite pardon her curiosity to view what he considered a debasing spectacle.

It was a vast and picturesque throng that Kate

^{*} Sol and Sombra are used to denote the sun and shade divisions of a bull-ring. The Sombra, or shade division, comprises the lower seats and boxes patronized by the aristocracy. The Sol, or sun, is the upper division, mainly occupied by the Indian admirers of the bloody sport.

Fisher beheld. The immensity of the building itself impressed her. The surging crowds, the music, the buzz of conversation in French, German, Spanish, English and Aztec, the shouting and hurrahing, waving of hats and handkerchiefs, and wild gesticulating peculiar to all the Latin races under unusual excitement, bewildered and almost startled her for a few moments. But she soon recovered her wonted composure and regarded with peculiar interest the mass of half-clad Indian spectators crammed into the upper division of the coliseo, very appropriately called Sol (sun), since there was not a spot therein where the great luminary did not pour down his hot rays in full force on the thoughtless aborigines in their flaring, zarapes rebosos and all manner of sombreros. All the colors of the rainbow were therein blended, and Sol, in her eyes, resembled a sort of barbaric crown to the vast circular edifice dedicated to the national sport.

While she was still gazing at the mass of Aztec devotees, the bugle sounded a command for the music to cease. A stillness at once came over the great assemblage; all eyes were turned toward the spot from which would issue the performers. The doors swung open, and the amateur, cuadrilla, in gorgeous costume, burst into the ring, smiling and bowing gracefully to the spectators. Then followed other bugle blasts, and Kate's heart beat fast as she observed the first bull rush madly into the ring, quivering with the pain inflicted by the three darts thrust into his shoulders as he rushed through the entrance gate.

The infuriated beast ran hither and thither seeking someone to gore and tear in revenge for

the sharp wounds already inflicted. The cuadrilla scattered in every direction, but returned again and again to flaunt their scarlet capas before the poor brute's eyes, thus enraging it more and more. The bull plunged and tore madly, sometimes almost overtaking and impaling on his horns one of the rash tormentors. But the daring amateurs were light and active, and always managed to dodge behind the large wooden screens or to vault over the barriers in the very nick of time. The spectacle fascinated the young girl; she scarcely breathed as she followed every variation in the dangerous sport.

At first it was only the play of the capas, the waving of the red shawls to excite the bull.

Then followed the play of the dart-piercers, called bandillereros. Each performer holding a dart in each hand gets in front of the bull, inviting him to advance. The bull accepts and plunges forward; so does the man, who, just as a collision seems inevitable, nimbly slips to one side, while the bull has his head lowered to attack, and drives the two darts into the animal's neck or shoulders. It is a very dangerous part of the sport—particularly for amateurs. Kate experienced a decided tremor every time she observed one of the amateurs preparing for this feat. But each and everyone escaped without a scratch, though most of them were not very successful in their thrusts.

Next came the mounted picadores, men clad in thick leathern coats and trousers, armed with long spears, and riding the most wretched-looking steeds ever seen outside of an equine hospital. Their business is to still further enrage the bull by prodding

him with their long spears. The animal generally turns away from the horseman when he feels the spear's point in his flesh, but sometimes he presses forward in spite of pain, and with his cruel horns imbedded in the poor horse's body, overturns both steed and rider. Then woe to the picador if the capas are slow or timid. A moment's delay in attracting the bull's attention from prostrate horse and rider, by the waving of their flaming red cloaks, would mean death to the unlucky picador. For the disemboweled horse there is no pity; he is forced to his legs again with his entrails hanging out, and would you believe it, gentle readers?-once more spurred before the bull to withstand the savage assault. This horrible part of the spectacle was not wanting at the amateur display. Kate closed her eyes at the first sight of the poor wounded horse, and clutched Geoffrey's arm involuntarily.

He had seen it all before and did not mind this repetition. He knew also that the best way was to allow her to remain with closed eyes, until the spear play would be over. To attempt to take her away during its continuance would be to bring under her eyes again the horrible spectacle she wished to avoid. But when the picadores had withdrawn and he told her she might again open her eyes, the shout of "Kill, kill" in Spanish, that went up all around her attracted her attention again to the ring. The bull seemed to be at rest-standing with his back up against the barrier, and looking all about as if seeking some way to escape the further torture. A handsome, well-formed young fellow was in the middle of the ring, with a sword in his hand, bowing respectfully before one of the

boxes, in which was the President of the Republic, accompanied by his wife and members of his cabinet.

- "That is the espada," said Geoffrey. "He is the one who will give the death-thrust to the bull. Will you go now, or wait?"
- "I couldn't leave now, Geoffrey," replied Kate, faintly. She was quite pale and seemed ready to faint.
- "I think I had better carry you out," he said, in alarm. "I feared this would be too much for you."
- "No, no; don't mind now. I suppose it will soon be over. I don't mind the rest."
- "As you wish, Kate," he replied, taking one of her hands.

Meantime, the espada had thrown his hat gayly into the air and taken a capa in his left hand, throwing it partly over his left shoulder, so that it ran over his arm like a shield. Then he clutched his sword firmly and partially concealed the blade under his capa. He advanced toward the bull, which was still resting against the barrier, the blood trickling from a dozen cruel wounds received from spears and darts. The brute had the same weary, anxious look of wishing to avoid any more encounters. But he did not budge.

The success of the sword-thrust depends upon the movements of the bull. He must be away from the barrier, so that the espada may have every opportunity to dodge any quick buck from the terrible horns, and, if need be, get behind a convenient screen or over the barrier. As this bull

would not be provoked by the maneuvers of the swordsman alone, the capas were again brought into requisition and the animal was thus finally coaxed to the middle of the ring. Then the espada advanced without a falter at a quick run, and the bull, as if realizing the supreme moment had come, lowered his head and pawed the ground angrily. The would-be executioner got within about twenty paces of the brute before it showed a disposition to charge. Then quickly it darted forward. It seemed that no man could escape that fierce plunge, but the young swordsman dodged nimbly to one side without receiving a scratch, only smiling at the bull's stupidity. A burst of applause rewarded the young man and spurred him to still more daring feats. Again and again he provoked the bull's furious onslaught until at length the cry of "Kill, kill" broke forth anew. The crowd had had a surfeit of his skill as a dodger and clamored now for some show of his proficiency in the fatal thrust. The young fellow took the hint and approached the bull for the final stroke. On he rushed; forward to meet him came the bull with furious speed. Down went the two horns to transfix the swordsman, while at the same instant, by a quick movement to one side, the man was able to make a vigorous thrust with his espada. He missed his aim, the weapon fell from his hand, and at the same moment he stumbled to the ground.

A cry of horror arose, for the bull had turned at once to charge on the prostrate youth. Kate clutched again Geoffrey's arm; her head swam; she closed her eyes, and then fainted. Geoffrey took her in his arms, and, with all the tumult and

uproar ringing in his ears, bore her safely out the building.

CHAPTER XVI.

IT must have been a terrible shock the young girl received, for it was not until she had been carried to the hotel and placed on her bed that she fully recovered consciousness. Mrs. Sims was bending over her tenderly, and Geoffrey standing at the head of the bedstead where he could not be seen, when she re-opened her eyes.

"Where is he, mother? Where is he? Is he hurt? Oh! tell me—tell me," murmured Kate.

"Who, darling?" asked Mrs. Sims.

"Geoffrey-Geoffrey, of course," was the terrified response.

"I am here—quite safe—why should I be hurt?" answered Geoffrey, approaching.

Kate impulsively seized his hand and drew him toward her. His head rested lightly on her bosom, with her hand about his neck, as she sobbed:

"Oh! thank God!"

Mrs. Sims shed tears of joy herself over what she beheld—the involuntary display of Kate's long-hidden love for her son.

"Thank God, indeed!" murmured the old lady to herself.

Suddenly Kate seemed to remember herself. The pallor of her cheeks gave place to deep blushes. She released Geoffrey's head and covered her face with her hands.

"You were confused," said Geoffrey, gently.

"I know, of course, what you meant. You were thinking of the poor young fellow in the bull-ring. He was not killed, Kate—only a little hurt by his fall. His companions saved him in time."

Her color only deepened at this ready effort of Geoffrey's to extricate her from the consequences of her own tell-tale acts, and Geoffrey, in order to relieve her confusion as much as possible, quietly withdrew from the room.

Mrs. Sims walked to the side of the bed and clasped Kate in a warm embrace.

"My darling Kate — my own sweet loving daughter," she exclaimed.

"Oh! mother! mother! What have I done?"

"Nothing, darling; lie back there and rest. Close your eyes, and you will soon regain calmness."

Mrs. Sims followed her son to the adjoining room. He was standing at the window, looking out, and turned quickly as his mother approached. He saw her dear face radiant with the realization, at last, of what her heart had so long wished for. Her warm, motherly kiss only made the despair at his heart deeper.

"I have long prayed for this hour, my son. God has at last heard my prayers."

She was terrified by the agonized tones of his voice as he exclaimed:

"Oh! mother! mother!"

"What can you mean, my son? Do you not love her in return?"

"I must not—I dare not. Oh! mother, ask mano questions now."

"Geoffrey! Geoffrey! my son!"

Wonder, fear, pity and love were all commingled in the look with which she regarded him, standing before her with bowed head—the picture of misery and despair. Her heart sank within her, as a sudden painful thought passed through her mind; yet she reached for his hand and drew him toward her.

"My son, the time for concealment has passed.
Tell me all—for my sake—for your own—for hers."

"I do love her, mother, with all my heart. I know she loves me in return—but—but—"

"Geoffrey, are you already married? Only that could prevent your marriage with Kate."

His silence was enough. She read the truth in his downcast look. Some terrible moments elapsed before she gathered courage to say:

"You are, then, secretly married. I won't say you have deceived me, Geoffrey—but you have not thought your mother worthy of your confidence. Oh! my son, my son—"

"Mother, indeed you wrong me there. It was not that—no, nothing of that kind. It was only to save you from sorrow and—and—shame!"

"Shame, Geoffrey! Shame! Oh, God! what new misfortune is this?"

He was about to answer—to tell all in a headlong, excited way—when a knock came to the door and a servant entered, bearing a cablegram. Geoffrey opened it hurriedly and read:

"Belle Sanders fatally wounded yesterday in railway accident in Canada. G. F."

He staggered and almost fell. The message dropped from his hands.

"Read it, mother—read it," he exclaimed, in a choking voice, pointing to the cablegram.

"Who is Belle Sanders-not your-your wife?"

asked Mrs. Sims, quickly.

"Yes, mother—my wife—dead—dead," he answered, solemnly. His face was of an ashen hue, and his whole frame shook convulsively.

"And such an awful death! I far, far away from her, too—I who should have watched and guarded her—who should never have left her side."

Mrs. Sims knew that such grief as her son's could only be caused by some terrible secret history. But she felt it was not the time to seek its disclosure, and remained silently at Geoffrey's side, stroking his hand lovingly.

It is full time, however, to enlighten the reader as to the sad events that followed Geoffrey Sims's disappearance from New York with his young wife before his mother's departure for Europe.

Both Sophie and Geoffrey were earnestly resolved to live only for each other from the moment of their reconciliation in West Eleventh street. Their honeymoon in Canada was without a flaw, and he found so much to admire in his wife, so many unexpected good qualities, that he ceased to regard that "duty" recommended to him by Kate Fisher so pathetically as a task either very disagreeable or difficult to perform. Indeed, for awhile he fully believed there was to be more mutual sympathy and happiness in store for them than he had dared to hope when leaving San Francisco.

What a pity the unalloyed bliss of the first few weeks of their married life could not continue for-

ever! But in Geoffrey's case there happened what always befalls in cases of unequal matches. The critical stage slowly set in, but very surely, and he began to notice, with regret, the remarkable differences between the manners of his mother and of Sophie. His wife, bright and quick-witted though she was-with all her capacity to imitate-had not, somehow, cultivated the refinements of social life so easily within her reach. At times he found her unconventional ways very inconvenient and disagreeable. He tried to change them by gentle hints. He never lost patience, but he did permit himself occasionally to show signs of depression of spirits, which Sophie naturally enough attributed to the true cause. Whenever he felt disposed toward melancholy, he would go out alone on some shallow pretext, and work off the fit of depression by some vigorous exercise. He did not fail to notice on his return how dispirited Sophie also appeared. Then he would experience savage pangs of remorse, and strive by redoubled attentions and tendernesses to dispel her gloom and sadness.

Geoffrey Sims, for all his manly ways and good intentions, was lamentably weak in some respects. It was a weakness that very often develops in the children of nouveaux riches—extravagantly morbid sensitiveness on the subject of social equality. He attached altogether too much importance to the solecisms committed by Sophie—he dreaded the moment when he would have to present her to his mother—and above all to Kate.

Certainly he had another and more satisfying reason to his own mind for deferring the acknowledgment of his marriage. That was to test fully

the strength of Sophie's resolution to fulfill her promise of abstention from wine. He overlooked all the time the one important fact, that he owed a higher duty to Sophie herself than to mother, or Kate, or selfish personal pride; that it was her right to have the marriage publicly proclaimed, whatever might be the consequences to anybody else. If he had been truly wise, he would have known that Sophie's best hope of firmness and safety would have been the society and example of his own noble-minded mother and her adopted daughter. He would have understood also, that Kate Fisher's nature was not of the feeble sortthat her strength of character and rectitude of purpose would have supported her, even under such a severe blow as his own marriage with another.

During the periods of mutual depression, Sophie almost always pleaded with him to take her to his mother and put an end to all further secrecy about their marriage. He was weak enough to promise readily, but not strong enough to perform, and it naturally resulted that Sophie grew sadder and sadder after each disappointment, which she could only attribute to one cause—unwillingness to acknowledge her as his lawful wife.

Some six or eight months after his mother's departure for Europe, a circumstance occurred that precipitated a most deplorable disclosure of his real state of mind.

Sophie had grown more and more depressed, and longed exceedingly for some friendly ears into which to pour the anguish of her soul. Of whom could she think more naturally at such a time than

of her former companion and friend, Mrs. Sands? She wrote to her one morning in the height of one of her periods of anguish, inviting her to spend a few weeks with her in Canada. An answer accepting the invitation arrived sooner than Sophie expected. It frightened her at first, and she hesitated to inform her husband. But as it was absolutely necessary to tell him, she summoned up the necessary courage at last.

"You have asked her to come without consult-

ing me, Sophie?" asked Geoffrey, in dismay.

"Yes, Geoffrey; but I had no idea you would object. You seem completely annoyed. Oh! Geoffrey, I am very sorry."

"I am annoyed, Sophie, for I don't think she is a good companion for you. You must write to her not to come at all," said Geoffrey, precipitately.

"Oh! Geff, how can I do such a thing?" pleaded Sophie, with tears in her eyes. "She is my oldest and best friend."

"I know, dearest, and I want to be very kind to her on that account. But now you are my wife, and I must consider you and myself above even your oldest and best friend, Sophie. It is unadvisable altogether to resume your former relations with her. I will make a comfortable allowance for her, so that she may never want for anything; but you and she must not meet again, Sophie, and it is better to discontinue your correspondence henceforth," said Geoffrey, with great firmness.

"It is too late, Geoffrey, she will be here tonight. Oh! for my sake, let her come this time, Geoffrey, and we will gradually break up our intimacy. It will be cruel to cut her after inviting her."

Geoffrey kissed the weeping eyes, and replied gently:

"Sophie, for your own sake, darling, I must be cruel this time and deny your request. You love me, I am sure, and our own society ought to be enough for us a very long time yet. Ask me anything else under the sun, and I will grant it. But this cannot be, Sophie. She is a dear, good woman, Mrs. Sands, but not a safe guide, companion or friend for you, now, my dear."

"Oh! Geff, what shall I do? How shall I notify her? It is impossible," cried Sophie, rebelliously.

"Never mind about that part, Sophie. I will manage it all. Don't worry. Leave everything to me," was the placid but firm answer of her husband.

He went out quickly, noticing her terrible depression and yet a certain brilliance in her eyes that he remembered but too well having observed before. He felt somewhat alarmed, but yet he firmly believed he was doing what was best for Sophie as well as for himself.

How he managed it need not be related here, but Mrs. Sands's visit was not made to the pretty little furnished house the young Sims couple inhabited in the city of Montreal. When Geoffrey—his heart full of tender solicitude for the wife whose pleasure he had been compelled to interrupt—reached the house, he hurried to the little sitting-room. It was empty.

"Where is your mistress?" he demanded of the servant-maid.

"Please, sir, I think she is not well and has gone to bed," was the answer.

With a vague apprehension he ascended to his wife's sleeping apartment, and stole toward the large, old-fashioned canopied bedstead, the curtains of which he drew aside nervously. Sophie was partly disrobed and sleeping. She was breathing heavily and her cheeks stained with tears. The young husband's soft heart was at once melted to tenderness.

"Poor girl! I have been too severe with her. The trial was too much. But it is all for her own good," he exclaimed.

And he bent forward to kiss her tear-stained cheek. Almost immediately he drew back in dismay, for the odor he detected filled him with disgust, changing loving tenderness to hot indignation.

"Ah! fallen again! She has broken her promise—yielded again to the terrible temptation!"

Muttering thus, in a louder tone than he supposed, he paced the room in a state of mind bordering on despair. He had fondly hoped her cured of the lamentable weakness, but now his hopes were dashed forever. Was his life to be a perpetual struggle to shield her from temptation? Was it decreed that all his own unselfish devotion—marrying her against judgment and interest and all—was only to receive such reward as this?

Forgetful of the fact that Sophie was lying only a few feet away, and might overhear his impas-

sioned and not altogether just explosions of indignant reproaches against fate, he continued for some time to give free vent to the long pent-up thoughts. At last, physically and mentally exhausted, he sat down before the blazing wood fire and gazed into it vacantly. Suddenly he felt a light pressure on his shoulder, and, turning quickly, beheld Sophie at his side. She was weeping, but yet her voice sounded firm and clear as she said:

"Geoffrey, you are right. I am not fit to be your wife. Let me go away, then. You shall be as free as if you never had married me!"

"Sophie!" he exclaimed. "Oh! Sophie! You have been listening to me—have heard all my despairing muttering?"

"Enough, at least, to know that you do not really love me as a wife should be loved—that I am only an obstacle to your happiness—that you would be better separated from me—that your marriage was a great mistake for us both—that you would like to be free from the yoke of a drunken wife—"

"Stop, stop, Sophie, you must not say such things. I will not listen to them," shouted Geoffrey, again yielding to the generous impulse of his nature.

"It is too late—too late, Geoffrey. I have heard from your own lips the secret thought of your soul, which only confirm suspicions that humbled me before our marriage. The suspicions were lulled to sleep by our happy honeymoon"—Sophie was weeping bitter tears—"but now they are rudely re-awakened, and I cannot live as your wife on sufferance any longer. I am a weak, foolish, irreso-

lute woman with whom you never could be happy, Geoffrey, and I will not stand in your way."

"Sophie! Sophie!—be silent. Hush! the servants will hear you. You have been dreaming a wild dream. Go to bed now, and sleep. You will awake with better thoughts. We will both laugh over your dreams to-morrow," said Geoffrey, taking the feverish hand and leading her to the bed.

Sophie shook her head sadly, but made no resistance. She listened in silence with closed eyes to the penitent entreaties of her young husband, to dismiss from her mind forever the gloomy thoughts and suspicions that possessed her. When she seemed to be asleep again, Geoffrey marveled at the strange turn events had taken. Somehow he had been put on the defensive instead of his wife. It was he who sued for pardon in the end-he who made light of his wife's grievous error, and tried to convince her that what he had uttered was only the fantastic creations of her own dreams! He could not put out of sight the fact that he had been strangely weak and irresolute himself in condoning so foolishly her great fault. The thought made him hot and angry again, and instead of going to bed, he took refuge in his little smoking-room, where, reclined on a soft lounge with his feet wrapped in a hnge buffalo rug,

"Tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep,"

came to him, and he slumbered soundly till long past his usual hour for waking.

When he entered his wife's chamber she had

gone. A letter, stained with tears, addressed to himself was on the table. He took it and read as follows:

Dear Geoffrey—It is best that we part—best for you and for me. You have never really loved me. I have never been to you what a wife should be. I have been foolish, weak and—you know what I mean. After what I heard last night from your own lips, when you did not think I was listening, I realize I could only be a bar to you happiness. You have made our marriage a secret fortunately. Let it remain so. Harewell, Geoffrey. Farewell forever, my dear husband.

SOPHIE.

CHAPTER XVII.

An unscrupulous man would have rejoiced over the desertion of an unloved wife. But Geoffrey Sims, as our readers must admit, was by no means a man of that stamp. He was only irresolute and weak through superabundance of good nature—just as his mother had described him. Therefore he neither tore his hair like a despairing lover, nor yet did he indicate by his manner in any way that he was indifferent as to his wife's fate or not really anxious for her return. A very mauvais quart d'heure indeed was that he suffered immediately after reading Sophie's pathetic letter, but the second sober thoughts that succeeded enabled him to face the situation with becoming coolness. Perhaps it was the conviction of how he would act under the circumstances in Sophie's place, that made him believe she would return after a few days' absence-sadder, but thoroughly penitent. She did not return, however-neither after a few days nor a few weeksnor was he able to trace her, either through the "governor" or by the aid of detective skill, which was employed discreetly, in a manner to prevent any public scandal. As a last hope he went to New York and disclosed the situation to George Fenton.

"I did not imagine you would care so much, George," remarked the Californian, observing the broker's pained look, as he related, with rather more detail than necessary, all the curious features of his life with Sophie, preceding and leading up to

her flight. He suppressed all reference to Kate Fisher, however.

"It is an unexpectedly sad story, Geoffrey. I own I was in no way prepared for what you have told me. But you want me to advise you—to suggest how your wife may be found. I'm afraid I am unequal to the task," said Fenton, slowly, and with an effort at calmness.

"That's what I was afraid of. I ought to have consulted you sooner—when she first disappeared. Now, I suppose, it's too late. You haven't even a suggestion to make?" inquired Geoffrey.

"I might make a suggestion, if I knew all,"

replied Fenton.

"All!" echoed Geoffrey, somewhat astonished.

"You have suppressed nothing?" demanded Fenton.

"Absolutely nothing necessary to your full understanding of the case," said Geoffrey.

Fenton maintained silence for awhile. His friend could not help being struck with something unusual in the expression of his face.

"Excuse me for asking the question, Geoffrey, but I have a very grave reason for doing so. Do you really love your wife?"

Geoffrey started.

"I mean, of course, in the way a husband should love—her alone—no one else?" continued Fenton.

Geoffrey seemed too overwhelmed with astonishment to respond.

"Let me change the form of question a little, Geoffrey, by asking if you do not love Miss Fisher more than your wife?" "George!" exclaimed Geoffrey. "George!
George!"

"Ah! Geff, it's a great pity. If you had only been more deliberate in the Vernon affair, how much better it would have been for all parties," observed Fenton in a low, constrained tone. "I understand but too well, now, the whole case. You asked me for a suggestion just now; I will give you one. It is this: Don't seek out your wife for the present. Give her time to reflect. Perhaps she has adopted the wiser course after all. At all events, you don't want to constrain her. I have no doubt that in due time you will hear from her in some form or other. Promise me you will let the affair rest as it is now until my return. I am going out of town for four or five days."

"I will do as you wish, George. I don't know how you have read my secrets, but you seem to have done so correctly. And you are the only man living to whom I would have made the confession. I don't understand your motive for probing so closely, but I'm sure it is a good one, and to show my entire faith in you I now promise you nothing more shall be done until we meet again. Here is

my hand on it."

Fenton wrung his friend's hand warmly, and soon after went away.

"How oddly he looked at me!" thought Geoffrey. "I wonder what ails him, and, above all, I wonder how he came to guess so near the truth. It seems to me stranger now than when he was here. He's a queer fellow, anyhow, but loyal as loyal can be."

A few hours later on the same day George was

on his way to Canada, by the shortest route, and if he had been seen by Geoffrey Sims, a change still greater would have been noticed in the young broker's appearance. So careworn did he look—so utterly dejected—that Geoffrey might have thought some terrible calamity had overtaken his friend. What had caused such a startling alteration? To explain it properly it is necessary to go back a little again, as we have already done in the case of Geoffrey and Sophie.

During the Californian's absence in San Francisco, Fenton had seen a great deal of Sophie Vernon, and he found himself soon completely under the spell of her charming manner. As Geoffrey's great friend, he was always welcomed warmly by the actress, and as most of their conversation, somehow, always concerned Geoffrey, he could account for the fact only in one way: Sophie must love Geoffrey dearly. But how was it with Geoffrey? Did he reciprocate her love? Did he even suspect it existed? Unfortunately he had no means of satisfying himself on the point, except by asking Sophie herself, and, somehow, he did not like even to sound her on the point. He felt it would be indelicate, and yet it seemed to him that, while he doubted, he ought not to continue visiting the actress. It savored a little of disloyalty to the friend who had so generously and recklessly rescued him from ruin. Still he could not resist the temptation. He went and went, and fell more and more under her spell. It made him exceedingly wretched when alone, but the pleasure he experienced when in her presence compensated a hundredfold for all his lonely hours of anguish.

One day when he called, he was made the unwilling witness of her fondness for wine, and Mrs. Sands was so far gone that she let fall some careless hints that made him believe there was something very serious in the relations of Geoffrey and Sophie. He went away, filled with sorrow not unmixed with something like disgust. He felt that he must do something, as a loyal friend, to warn Geoffrey. But he also knew he could never write the horrible naked truth. And what stunned him more than all was to find that the discovery of Sophie's weak penchant for wine had not extinguished his own singular infatuation for her. Not in the least. On the contrary, the feeling of pity for her-of a deep longing to save her-only intensified his love. But he was bound to Geoffrey Sims by such a strong tie of gratitude and such sincere friendship—and he was in heart and soul so truly honorable—that he could not escape the conclusion that it was his duty to give some hint, cost what it might. It was through this conviction, still oppressing him next morning, that he wrote the few lines to Geoffrey, which, vague and general though they were, threw the young Californian into such fearful gloom and hastened his departure for New York.

When Fenton afterward learned of the marriage, it was like a death-blow to all his hopes for a few moments. He felt very much like rushing away, at once, to the ends of the earth. But he was a man of real nerve, and soon mastered all the fierce impulses that tempted him. He resolved to do the only thing that remained to him—submit courageously to fate, and act loyally by his friend.

The marriage, he knew, was a mistake; Geoffrey was not really suited to Sophie—he was too easygoing and pliant—and Fenton's mind was filled with gloomy forebodings of what the future might bring forth. He had not then any glimmering of the sad truth—not the slightest suspicion of the real state of Geoffrey's heart. All he suspected was that Geoffrey had married in haste, without calculating the consequences.

And now he, George Fenton, was madly rushing on to Canada to find the woman he loved and thrust himself into danger. Find her he would. On that he was resolved, and save her, too—rescue her from herself, and—well, yes—restore her to the arms of her husband—compel her to go back to the protecting arms of him who alone in all the world had the legal and moral right to protect her.

He was three days in Montreal without finding any trace of her. Then accident threw him in her way. It was at the theater, on the stage, that he found her, playing one of the leading parts, under the assumed name of Belle Sanders. After the play he followed her to her lodgings, and then went back to his own hotel. As the next day would be Sunday, he rightly divined she would be at leisure. He resolved to call upon her about noon.

The hours intervening were hours of terrible torture. He could not sleep, for now that he had succeeded in finding her and would be with her so soon, he began to doubt the propriety of the step he was about to take. Was he after all justified in interfering? Would she thank him? Would Geoffrey even deem it right, if he suspected the love

that was burning in his friend's heart? Would it not be wiser to go right back to New York, inform Geoffrey as to where he could find his wife? He could not decide.

Though Sophie's lodgings were not more than fifteen minutes walk from the Windsor Hotel, and though he had resolved not to call before noon, Fenton was in the street at ten o'clock in the morning, walking feverishly up and down the block on which the apartment-house in which she lodged stood. He was startled by the mad way his heart bounded, as he ascended at last the short flight of stairs leading to the door of her apartment. He paused irresolutely before knocking. Then he tapped ever so gently, and to the musical "Come in" opened the door and entered.

Sophie was seated on a lounge in a morning wrapper, and started to her feet at once on seeing a gentleman. In a moment he saw how pale and ill she looked—the dark semicircles under her saddened eyes told of intense mental anguish, and her wasted form showed what ravages grief had already wrought in her whole system. She recoiled on recognizing her visitor.

"I took the liberty of calling, Mrs. Sims-"

"Don't-don't mention that name again, Mr. Fenton-I am Miss Sanders here," she interrupted.

"Pardon my intrusion, but you know my object—that I do not come through idle curiosity. I come on behalf of the best friend I ever had—the best man I ever knew—to appeal to you for your own sake—for his—"

"It is useless. I have made my decision. It is irrevocable. I know what you would say, but it

is too late. I do not wish to hear it," murmured Sophie, in a strange and unnatural tone.

"Sophie, for God's sake, hear me. Don't dismiss me in this way. I cannot leave without making one effort, at least, to dissuade you from the unreasonable course you are pursuing. If you know how intensely Geoffrey has suffered—how he longs to see you again—"

"Don't—don't, Mr. Fenton. Spare me such a recital. He has suffered enough. So have I, God knows," pleaded Sophie, with an unsteady voice. "Of what use is it to increase my burden by appeals that can have no result. I tell you—I swear before God—nothing can move me from my purpose. I will never live with Geoffrey again—never see him if I can help it. I wish all the past buried—even my name."

"How is that possible, Sophie? Such a thing cannot be. You are married legally. You are his wife and—"

"Married! yes! but let the marriage be set aside. There are ways of securing divorces without scandal. Let Geoffrey secure such a divorce. I will help him. Or, if that is impossible, let him secure one openly. I will not object. But under no circumstances, Mr. Fenton, will I ever live with him again. You understand me, do you not? Never—never!"

"He would not agree to that, Sophie. He loves you too well—"

"He does not love me," interrupted Sophie.

"He tried to do so, but it was a failure. I pity him and would spare him. You must promise me not to tell him you have met me."

"That I cannot do."

"Then hear me. If you do not, or rather if he makes the slightest attempt to follow me, I will go somewhere or do something which he will always regret," said Sophie, with a wild, despairing look that chilled Fenton's blood. "I am in a desperate mood, and must not be trifled with. I ask only to be left alone. You must promise, at least, to warn me in time, should Geoffrey determine to pursue me when you have told him of our conversation."

"That I can promise," said Fenton, promptly. "But can nothing move you, Sophie? Think before I leave you. I may never see you again. I mean you may never allow me again. Take time. Don't decide now. Wait a few days. Let me call again."

"No, no, no," answered Sophie, with extraordinary decision. "If you wish to consult my happiness—at least my comparative peace of mind—urge me no more. Help me to be firm. Aid me in the course I feel to be best for all. Be my friend as well as his."

"Indeed I am your friend, Sophie," replied Fenton, warmly, "My heart bleeds for you, and it is because I feel you are wrong to yourself as well as to him, that I urge you to take time."

"You are a good man, Mr. Fenton, and I honor you. But it is useless, I repeat, to endeavor to dissuade me."

A fearful struggle now took place within his own bosom. Though she had almost commanded him to leave, he stood silently before her with an expression that alarmed her.

"Are you ill, Mr. Fenton?" she asked, with feeling.

He made no answer at once, but walked to her

side and took her hand.

"Sophie, hear me!" he exclaimed at last, "and hear me patiently. Do not misunderstand me. When I tell you I love you with all my heart and soul, think nothing bad of me, or that I intend to offer insult. I love you so deeply that I cannot quit you thus, leaving you to a fate worse than death. Let me be a brother to you, that I may be always near to protect you. Think how young you are—how many happy years may yet be in store for you. Do not give way to despair now. Do not condemn yeurself by this hasty decision to a future of misery. I would never have spoken thus to you -the love I cherish would have remained buried in my heart forever, and I would have remained loyal to Geoffrey to my last hour, had I succeeded in persuading you to return to his protection. But now, Sophie, I cannot be silent. I cannot relinquish the last hope of saving you from yourself. Will you, for my sake, if not for his or your own, allow me to watch over you as a brother? I shall never ask for more, believe—oh! trust me, Sophie, unless-unless-which I feel to be hopeless-he would consent to relinquish you by a divorce. Then indeed I would-"

"Mr. Fenton!"

She had sank back on the sofa from which she had hastily risen. Her eyes had closed. Her bosom heaved convulsively. He seized again the hand she had withdrawn.

"Sophie! oh, Sophie! I have offended-startled

you. Forgive me. I know not what I am saying or doing. I am mad—mad—but—not dis—disrespectful——"

"No, no—I know it, Mr. Fenton. But—but you are wrong—indeed you are—to speak in this way. It is not for me to reproach you for a love you think you cannot smother. Too well I know what it is to suffer with a hopeless love. But, oh! Mr. Fenton, don't add to my load. How heavy it was before, you may be able to understand——"

"Forgive me, Sophie—Mrs. Sims, I mean. But, oh! let me, I implore you, be of some use. Don't drive me away without allowing me to help you in some way."

There was such earnestness and sincerity in his voice, that the tears gushed from her eyes; she was unable to make any reply at once.

"I had no thought of all this, Mr. Fenton. I pity you from the bottom of my heart. But what can I do?"

"I ask nothing; only let me serve you in some way, and promise me above all that you will not fly from here when I am gone—that you will not hide your address from me—that you will suffer me to come to you occasionally, to guard and watch over you. Let me provide a companion of your own sex to care for you. You are not strong—you ought not to be on the stage. You need rest and the tenderest care—"

"You are the soul of honor, Mr. Fenton—Kindness itself. Believe me, I am grateful to you. But as to the stage it is now my only hope—the one solace left to me—No, I won't say that, for I will always remember your goodness. But I would

only fret more without the excitement of the theater, which indeed is a protection in more ways than one. If I could tell you all, you would see I am right."

"My dearest friend, I do know the worst you can tell me. That is why I beg you so earnestly to listen to me now. Tell me you will allow me to watch over you like a brother—to save you from yourself. You are so good and true in all other respects. Be firm and true to yourself in that other respect also."

Again Sophie gave way to hot tears—Fenton's earnest reminder of her one great weakness, or rather the knowledge that even by him it was known and that yet he was ready to devote himself to her, affected her so deeply that she seized his hand and kissed it gratefully.

"You are too good and noble, Mr. Fenton. God bless and reward you," she murmured.

"Will you not let me serve you in some way? Is there nothing I can do—no one thing in all the world?" he demanded, with a choking voice.

"Yes, there is, and to show you my gratitude I will ask you to attend to it for me. I will promise you also to be—be—firm hereafter. You shall be as a brother to me, and I will trust you in all things."

"Tell me, then, what I can do?" he asked, eagerly.

She arose and unlocked a drawer, taking therefrom a bank and check-book, which she handed him, saying:

"There, take these with you to New York. You will see that I am not utterly destitute. I

know little about such things, for until my—my marriage Mrs. Sands always looked after them for me. Will you kindly look over them in New York and let me know what I have?"

"I will do it before I go away from Montreal. You will allow me to come to you to-morrow?" he inquired.

"Do not ask that, dear friend. I don't think I could be equal to another scene so soon," she answered, pleadingly.

"Let it be as you say. I will send these back to you, and, if it is any convenience, I will have the amount—whatever it may be—placed in bank here to your credit. Then it will be easier for you to draw than to wait for remittances from New York."

"You know best about that; I leave the details to you."

He bowed, and after a few more precious moments, left her and went to his hotel. Then he examined her bank-book, and finding it had not been balanced for quite a long time, he took advantage of the circumstance to practice a piece of generous deception. For a man so well known in the financial world it was an easy matter to arrange quickly the transfer of twenty thousand dollars from New York to Montreal, and this he did bright and early next morning. The amount thus transferred he deposited in the principal Bank of Montreal to the credit of Belle Sanders, and arranged all the details about her signature, so that she would be able to draw without unnecessary trouble.

As her book showed she had from time to time had considerable amounts on deposit, he hoped,

from the general fact that she had never paid much attention to such matters, that his little trick would never be detected.

In writing to her before leaving, he explained how much better off she was, financially, than he had hoped, and with her new bank-book he sent a puzzling statement in bewildering figures, which he felt certain would greatly assist in making the deception a success. He wrote:

"You must be sure not to neglect to write to me every week, for I shall be very anxious about your health. Should anything happen to render my presence necessary, telegraph me at once. I shall take the liberty of coming back occasionally, without waiting to be invited, to satisfy myself that you want for nothing and are doing well. Remember your solemn promises to me and always regard me as—

Your devoted brother, George."

Such were the words with which he concluded his first letter to the wife of his friend.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FIERCE disturber of all ties is love. The very best men and the very best women, once under the tyrannical yoke, are apt to become selfish, unjust, intolerant. It would not be quite true to say that love had already worked such a radical change in Fenton's nature, but it is certain that after the exciting interview with Sophie his feelings toward Geoffrey Sims were those of intense bitterness. Was it because Geoffrey had married, not loving Sophie? By no means. He frankly admitted to himself that in that act Geoffrey had shown the spirit of true henor and unselfishness. But he could not pardon the moral cowardice of a man who placed false shame, the opinion of the world in general, above duty. Geoffrey should not have concealed his wedding so long. Not only should he have informed his mother, but the whole world. It was criminal folly and weakness to sacrifice his wife's peace of mind to false pride. It was throwing away the last chance of curing Sophie of the one besetting weakness in her nature. What right had he to place anybody above his wife-no, not even his mother, let her be ever so pure and highminded?

"Would I have acted so?" Fenton asked himself. "Would I have placed Sophie in such a degrading position? Would I have hesitated a second between her interests and my own feelings, supposing for a moment that I could ever entertain

such childish feelings as those which evidently controlled Geoffrey's course with his beautiful wife?"

He was quite sure that no consideration in the world would have forced him to commit such a wrong. Many unhappy hours during his trip back to New York were given up to fierce criticism of his friend's criminal weakness before he began to relent and balance Geoffrey's good qualities—so many good qualities—against only one bad. After all, Geoffrey himself was also to be pitied. Was it not a fact that he loved another, and yet, through pure goodness of heart, had sacrificed himself for Sophie's sake? How strange that the same man was capable of so much generosity and yet so—so— No, he would not condemn Geoffrey any more. Who could tell all the agony of mind and heart his friend had suffered?

"I must not be unjust to him. I must never forget what a good, unselfish friend he has been—that I owe him all. No, no. It is not necessary to be ungenerous to him because my own love for her is so deep and true. It would do no good. What I have to consider now is the best course to be adopted under these painful circumstances," he thought, when his mind had gradually resumed its accustomed calmness.

What to do? What to do?

"I must prevent him from following her in some way. That is evident. It would be fatal to her. She is firm—determined—means all she said about never living with him again. Poor girl! Poor girl! What course can I possibly recommend? Why not divorce, after all? Is it not the only remedy left—the best for both—for all?"

thought Fenton, the idea of what then would some day be possible sending a thrill through his whole being.

The train had stopped at Poughkeepsie and his self-communings were interrupted by the transfer of passengers in and out. Three new passengers were ushered into the Wagner drawing-room car quite close to where he was sitting—a gentleman and two ladies.

"Why, George, how are you?" exclaimed the gentleman, advancing with outstretched hand.

"Mr. Fenton!" cried the two ladies simultaneously.

He recognized Mr. and Mrs. Remsford and Miss Ada.

"What an unexpected pleasure to meet an old friend here!" Mrs. Remsford declared.

Of all people in the world the Remsfords were those he would have preferred not to meet in his then peculiar frame of mind. He was quite aware that he had been rather a more frequent visitor at their house than formerly since the marriage of Geoffrey and Sophie, and also that the family had welcomed him with much of the warmth of an expectant son-in-law. It was true he had never given any real grounds by his own conduct for such an explanation of his visits. But, then, he had allowed himself to drift into a very remarkable intimacy. since that night of the dinner-party when he met Mrs. Sims and Miss Fisher, and he felt that Miss Ada's preferences for him of all other visitors was too evident to misunderstand. He had not cared very much one way or the other. He had said to himself often when alone in his own rooms: "Why

not? What difference can it make to me? The hope I once had is dead. Why not accept fate and try to make one heart happy? Ada is a good, sweet girl."

But now all was changed again. The thought of Ada or any other young lady seemed outrageous. Still he had a guilty sense of having encouraged-or at least of not having displayed indifference to the pretty little blandishments of Ada Remsford. He could not be rude now, that Ada was thrown in his path again, nor yet could he simulate a cordiality he did not feel, and the young girl, quick at detecting every little shade of alteration in his manner, recognized something at once in his face and voice that made her heart sink. The conversation soon narrowed down to a dialogue between himself and the matron. Ada seemed to find something wonderfully attractive in the view of land and water along the noble Hudson.

Mrs. Remsford had seen Geoffrey and Geoffrey had received some letters from his mother or Miss Fisher. Mrs. Sims was not getting stronger and had urged Geoffrey to join her at once. So much Fenton learned from the matron after a few moments' conversation.

"He ought to join his mother at once," said Fenton in a matter-of-fact way, though he felt his face flush as he uttered the commonplace remark.

"That's what I told him, too," Mrs. Remsford observed.

"You are entirely right, Mrs. Remsford."

"Of course—of course. No business should

detain him longer at this side of the Atlantic. But Geoffrey is a little eccentric, don't you think so?" demanded Mrs. Remsford.

"Well, not exactly that, but I have known him to take wrong views of matters," said Fenton, cautiously.

"He thinks a great deal of you," rejoined Mrs. Remsford. "You ought to urge him to go away

at once."

"I shall do so, I think, after what you have told me," responded Fenton. Then he exerted himself to entertain his three friends until the train reached the Grand Central Depot, and he bade them good-by with an exhibition of haste that deepened the sad expression of Miss Ada's face.

Arrived at his apartments, he found Geoffrey with an open letter in his hand, very much excited.

- "I am so glad you have returned, George. I'm in a regular fix and unable to decide by myself what I ought to do."
- "I think I understand the situation," replied George, hurriedly. "I met the Remsfords in the cars and learnt that you had received some alarming news from abroad. I hope it is not really serious?"
- "That's just it. Serious enough it looks, for I am sure Kate would not write so earnestly if mother's sickness were only some trivial affair. You know my position. I am chained here until I can make it up with Sophie some way, and yet I feel I ought to go."

"So do I, Geoffrey; you should go without further delay."

Geoffrey regarded his friend with astonishment.

"How is it possible, George? How can I leave with all this uncertainty concerning my poor wife's fate. If I could only see her once—even if I knew she was all right—or—"

"I can relieve you on that point, Geoffrey. I have seen her—"

"You have! how is she? Where is she?"

"I want you to promise me something before I answer your last question, Geoffrey," said Fenton, in a tone that startled Geoffrey.

"That is a curious request from you. Do you mean you won't tell me where my wife is—my wife—unless I make some unknown pledge in advance?" demanded Geoffrey, not a little annoyed as well as amazed.

"Yes, that is it, Geoffrey, and I am sure you won't consider it out of the way at all, when I tell you I have given my word of honor not to disclose your wife's place of concealment, unless you promise not to disturb her against her wishes after I had told you."

"George, this is monstrous," broke out Geoffrey in a sudden explosion of wrath. "You have made such a promise—you, my closest friend! Great Heavens! George, what can you mean by such a statement?"

"Sit down there as calmly as you can, and let me try to explain."

Geoffrey resumed his seat.

"I found your wife, and had a long and painful interview with her. I used every argument I could think of to induce her to return to you. I found it impossible to move her. Geoffrey, she is fully resolved never to resume her relations with you,

and I am convinced after all I saw and heard that it is better for you not to force yourself upon her——"

"What do you mean, in Heaven's name?" roared Geoffrey, again jumping from his seat, his eyes flashing angrily.

"I mean," rejoined Fenton, "that if you attempt to do so, she may commit some wild act in pure desperation, which you and I would regret to the last day of our lives."

"This is worse than anything I ever dreamt of," cried Geoffrey, wringing his hands.

"Do you suppose, Geoffrey, that under any other circumstances such a strange promise could have been wrung from me? No, indeed; be sure I would never have consented to be bound of such a strange obligation to secrecy if I did not feel the poor girl would do violence to herself in case of my refusal," continued Fenton, solemnly.

"Does she then hate me so fearfully?" cried Geoffrey, in agony.

"No, Geoffrey, it is not that. She loves you still—truly, devotedly; but she knows you do not love her—that you are ashamed of your marriage with her—and that you love another."

"George, I would do anything to please her—take her with me now to my mother—acknowledge her before all the world, and do my duty faithfully at all times," groaned Geoffrey.

"I know, I know, Geoffrey; but it is too late now for all that. Long ago you should have taken her to your mother. It was a fatal error, from which I would have tried to dissuade you had I known your real reasons for the concealment. Ah!

Geoffrey, that was wrong, very wrong; indeed, it was. How could you suppose that any sensitive woman could live and prosper under the strange conditions you imposed? It was monstrous, I tell you, monstrous."

In his excitement the harsh adjective escaped involuntarily from Fenton's lips.

"Oh, George!" cried Geoffrey, shocked at such an unexpected characterization of his conduct, but at the same time conscious that it was deserved.

"Excuse my brutal frankness, Geoffrey. I am sorry I used such a harsh expression, for I know you do not deserve it. You never meant to be really cruel or unjust; but you were unjust, Geoffrey, when you neglected to proclaim your marriage to all the world. It was an unintended cruelty to her, too."

"Yes, you are right, George. I see it all but too plainly now. But what am I to do? What course can I adopt to lessen her anguish—to assure her of my bitter repentance? You are calm and collected. Can you advise me? You are the friend of Sophie as well as my friend. You have only the best interests of both. Tell me, then, what is best?"

Fenton heard these words with a guilty twinge of conscience, and for a moment he felt a desire—almost irresistible—to make a full confession to his friend of the state of his own heart. But the thought of the possibility of divorce was too much for his good resolution. After all, would not divorce be the best remedy for both Geoffrey and Sophie? he asked himself again. For Geoffrey,

certainly, as it would leave him free to marry the woman he really loved.

"And for me," thought Fenton, "it would open a prospect at least. It will give me the chance to save her, and perhaps in due time to win her love by a display of unselfish devotion."

"Geoffrey," said Fenton, when he had arrived at this conclusion; "in answer to you I can only say that there is but one remedy under the circumstances, and that is the remedy suggested by your own wife."

- "What is it, then?" demanded Geoffrey.
- "A divorce," answered Fenton, in a strange, unnatural voice that startled himself.
 - "A divorce! a divorce!" echoed Geoffrey.
 - "Yes," repeated Fenton.
- "It is impossible," exclaimed Geoffrey, energetically, "and even if it were possible, it would be cowardly. I have made my own fate, and I will not shrink from it. How could you think I could be mean enough to accept such a relief offered only because she is heart-broken?"
 - "I do not understand your position. I have told you, and believe me, her resolution is final. She will never consent to live with you again. That being the case, and she being willing on any conditions to consent to a divorce, not to secure one is to condemn her to a life with a perpetual cloud over it. I repeat, I do not understand what you mean by saying it would be cowardly, any more than I see why a divorce is impossible."
 - "Excuse me for saying so, George, but it appears to me you are in favor of hurrying matters

to a crisis rather precipitately. But to explain once and for all, you must know that in our church divorces are only granted for the gravest reasons, and between Sophie and me no such reasons exist. I could not marry, even were a divorce to be granted. It is true that Sophie, not being of my faith, would be perfectly free to marry again, but you know how useless such freedom would be to her, as you say she still loves me truly and devotedly. No, George, a divorce is abhorrent to my religious convictions; but a separation can be managed—some kind of separation, I hope, which will relieve her from any stain or cloud, as you have said, and will still leave the door open at all times for reconciliation."

Fenton felt the unintentional sting in Geoffrey's allusion to precipitancy, and as he could advance no further arguments for the moment in favor of the divorce, he contented himself with answering such questions as were asked by the young husband, whose excitement had by this time very greatly subsided.

"I am disposed to leave affairs in statu quo for the present, at least. I conclude from your statement that Sophie is not in trouble about money matters, and that her health is in no danger," said Geoffrey, without contradiction by Fenton, "and I willingly commit her to your care, promising to do nothing compromising until I shall have decided what course is best to be taken, with your full concurrence. I have the fullest confidence in you, George, and I don't know that there is any more to be said about the matter now. I thank you, of course, with all my heart, and I hope you will

overlook any hasty expressions I may have ut-

Geoffrey extended his hand frankly, and Fenton shook it warmly, and with a genuine feeling of relief. So far he had handled the affair very successfully. But the hardest part was yet to come, and Fenton was not so sure of success.

CHAPTER XIX.

THERE were many subsequent conferences between the two young men concerning Sophie, and Fenton finally contrived to induce Geoffrey to abandon any immediate attempt at reconciliation, and to leave the final arrangement of the terms of temporary separation in his hands. That was as far as he could induce young Sims to go. Meantime later advices from Europe assured the latter of the more favorable condition of his mother, and while awaiting some new turn in his relations with Sophie, he resolved to pay a visit to San Francisco, some formalities connected with the probate of his father's will demanding his presence there. With Geoffrey thus out of the way, Fenton started again for Montreal. He had conceived a plan for Sophie's welfare, and he was eager to put it into execution without delay. He had heard of a system practiced by a celebrated physician in New York for the cure of people, and especially of ladies, addicted to overindulgence in wine, and he intended to persuade Sophie to submit to that treatment. It was essential for success that she should reside in or near

New York, and already he had selected a suitable house for her outside the great city, where she would be under the care of a most estimable matron, whose character and virtues could not fail to exercise a beneficent influence. There, too, he could see her more frequently and himself watch the steady stages of recovery. He expected opposition on her part, but he went determined to argue down all objections, and with a firm resolve not to return to New York without her. He was astonished and almost terrified at the strength of his own resolve, and wondered how he would execute it in case Sophie herself persisted in refusing. Fortunately, the alternative was not presented to him, as the actress, who certainly had greatly improved in appearance and spirits since his former visit, interposed no vigorous objections.

"I have accepted you as a brother," she said, with a slightly heightened color, "and the command of a good brother to a weak sister must be obeyed. Take me there, and may I be able to reward your brotherly interest by profiting to the fullest extent in the way you desire."

I am aware this must have a Quixotic air to certain matter-of-fact readers, but queer things are happening every day in this little world of ours unknown to its matter-of-fact inhabitants. And this translation of Sophie Sims, under the circumstances as described, from Montreal to the kindly curative shelter of a private home not far from the limits of the city of New York, is an incident of real life, of common enough occurrence, perhaps, if we only knew all that happens round about us.

And there Sophie continued for a long time.

When Geoffrey Sims got back from San Francisco some months afterward, filled with a new resolve to attempt a reconciliation, Sophie was still with the benevolent lady outside the city. But Fenton did not reveal the fact. He persuaded himself that an evasion was justifiable under the circumstances. So when Geoffrey besought him to arrange an interview for him with Sophie on any considerations, he made a protest for form's sake, but ended by agreeing to do his best to bring about what his friend desired. He showed Geoffrey the letter he prepared addressed to Montreal, and then sent it off. After days of waiting without receiving any word from Sophie, Fenton suggested to Geoffrey to write to the Canadian postmaster asking if the letter had been delivered. The reply that came back, "Party has left former residence-present address unknown," filled Geoffrey with alarm. He asked to be released from all pledges in order that he might proceed at once to Montreal to institute a search, and as Fenton could find no good excuse for refusing, he consented, only stipulating that in order to avoid public scandal the aid of police detectives should not be invoked.

"I tell you frankly, Geoffrey, it is only what I feared. She has gone off somewhere to avoid a meeting with you. I have no doubt she is perfectly safe, and that after a sufficient time has elapsed she will herself let me know where she is. In fact, I exacted that promise from her. You need not fret or worry. I am confident she is all right wherever she is, and that you will only do harm by disturb-

ing her—even supposing you will succeed in finding her, which I doubt. The mere fact of her flight only shows how earnest and fixed she must be in her resolve to live apart. But I have no right to enforce my own view. You are her husband and have a right to do as you please. I only give you my advice, since I am made a party to the deplorable business."

"What, then, ought I to do, in Heaven's name?" asked Geoffrey.

"I am afraid you would not adopt my advice if I offered it," said Fenton, evasively.

"Is it not better to tell me what the advice is first?" retorted Geoffrey, somewhat impatiently.

"If I were you, then, Geoffrey, I would make no move at present—not for a long time. I promise to watch over her like a brother. In the meantime my advice is that you go abroad. Join your mother, who is so anxious to see you. Remaining here is only prolonging an agony. You need all the sympathy and support a good mother can give. Go, then, to your mother and make a clean breast of the whole business."

The Californian almost shuddered at this suggestion, but he avoided any response to it. After a few moments of hesitation he took Fenton's hand and shook it warmly.

"George, I feel you are actuated only by the best of intentions, but I feel also that I must disagree with your advice. I must make an effort to find Sophie—to learn of her safety, even if I do not force myself upon her. If I fail in the attempt, then I promise you I will go abroad."

Geoffrey accordingly went to Canada, made a

fruitless search, and then sailed away for Europe. The events that succeeded must be summed up briefly. Sophie's improvement was rapid. The "home" influence from which Fenton expected so much was successful. His own bearing was unexceptionable. He saw Sophie frequently, but by no means so frequently as might be supposed—a fact due as much to Sophie's own ideas of what was right and proper as to the exercise of prudent forbearance on the part of Fenton. In due time she resumed her place on the stage, no longer as Sophie Vernon, but as Belle Sanders-not in New York, where her re-appearance would be paragraphed all over the world, but in Canada and the other provinces where she had won fame under her new name. Her profession proved not only a support but a healthful distraction to her. This Fenton acknowledged to himself, while he deplored her re-appearance on the stage. "What if in some fit of despondency she should fall again?" he asked himself many a time. But there was no help for it, and he bore his own restlessness and anxiety as best he could.

But Sophie did not fall. With time her health and her resolution both strengthened, and Fenton felt in duty bound to repeat the true situation from time to time to his friend, Geoffrey Sims.

We have already seen that all this time the young husband had weakly maintained the secret of his marriage. It was only when the terrible railroad disaster occurred that the truth at last was forced from him. A few facts relating to that occurrence and to the fate of Sophie must now be made known.

The young actress was on one of her starring tours, hurrying from one Canadian city to another, when the train that conveyed her suddenly smashed into another ahead on the same track. The engine of her train exploded, and, in the consequent wreck, some forty dead bodies in all the forms of dismemberment and mutilation were extricated from the piles of smoking débris. Only a handkerchief and a piece of one of her underskirts marked with her initials could be found—proof enough that her remains must be among the mutilated bodies in the improvised morgue near the railroad track.

It was true she might yet be among the survivors carried here and there by the good people residing around about. But Fenton, having exhausted inquiries and searches, at last gave up all hope and returned to New York, carrying with him the scorched handkerchief and other relics of his departed love. It was only one short week before that he had left New York in feverish haste. His abundant hair was dark then. Now it was quite gray, and his face looked ten years older. As he issued from the depot he passed two ladies, who regarded him intently for a few seconds. The younger of the two screamed and fell fainting to the sidewalk. He raised his eyes and saw Mrs. Remsford stooping over her daughter. He assisted the lady in conducting the girl to a carriage, and then resumed his way downtown.

When Geoffrey Sims arrived in New York from Mexico he was startled at the changed appearance of his friend. He had not seen him for more than a year, but that seemed too short a period to work such an extraordinary alteration.

"You have been seriously ill?" asked Geoffrey, anxiously. "My dear George, you ought to have informed me."

Fenton only smiled faintly, but there was something in his manner that seemed to repel the old confidential frankness, and Geoffrey checked the anxious questions he would like to have asked. Their interview was soon over. Fenton, in a cold, almost stern manner, told all he knew of the railroad tragedy, and then, in reply to a nervous sort of invitation from Geoffrey to accompany him on a trip to California, replied, almost curtly:

"No, Geoffrey; I prefer to work, work, work. That is better for me than idleness, at present."

The Californian could not conceal the pain Fenton's short, almost rude manner occasioned.

"Excuse me, Geoffrey, but I am not quite myself to-day. Don't mind my manner," said Fenton, hurriedly, endeavoring to atone for his brusqueness.

An hour or two later, when Geoffrey met Mr. Remsford, he was still more astonished on learning from that gentleman that the deplorable change in Fenton—the whitening of his hair, and the aged looks—were all the result of a few days' mental excitement. This is the way Mr. Remsford explained it:

"You see, among the victims of that terrible railroad accident in Canada was a young lady to whom Fenton was greatly attached. You've heard of Belle Sanders, have you not? Well, she was a sort of protegée of his. I have it from a lady in whose house Miss Sanders lived for quite awhile, up in Westchester, he was madly in love with the

girl. He used to visit her there often, and Mrs. Hughes thought somehow that there was some obstacle to their marriage, either on Fenton's part or on the lady's. At all events, Fenton was always most respectful in his attention, but all the same my friend could tell he was hopelessly in love. seems to have been a very unusual affair on both sides. But it is a fact that when Fenton learnt of the railroad accident he was wild with grief, and though he was only four or five days absent trying to recover the body of Miss Sanders, his hair was as white when he returned as it is to-day. They do say it turned from black to white in one night. But you know, my boy, such things are not rare. My wife and daughter saw him right after his return from Canada, and poor Ada was nearly frightened to death when she noticed the extraordinary change in his appearance. Why he's like an old man, now."

"And that was only two weeks ago?" said Geoffrey, with unusual self-command.

"Yes, about two weeks. But come, you don't look very cheerful yourself over these sad details," said Mr. Remsford. "The subject seems to make everybody miserable—my wife, Ada and you, as well as poor Fenton. I think a great deal of that young man, Geoffrey; in fact we all love him, and it is too bad we can't rouse him out of this dreadful depression. I don't mind telling you that I did sort of fancy at one time he had a notion toward our Ada, but it came to a sudden end. We noticed a great change in his attentions some time back. I think it was the day we accidentally met him on the train at Poughkeepsie. You remember, don't

you, before you went to California, about the time your dear mother left for Europe?"

Geoffrey started. A new light suddenly broke upon him. George, then, had loved her even away back in those days, when he hunted up Sophie after her flight from their little home in Montreal. George's motives in urging the separation and the divorce were now as plain as daylight. But there was no resentment on that account in Geoffrey's heart—only pity, heartfelt pity, for the lonely young broker, whose life as well as his own must have been without one ray of hope.

"Yes, I remember quite well," answered Geoffrey. "You were saying that—"

"I was going to tell you that up to that time I fancied Fenton and Ada were rather fond of each other, but since then I don't know what to think about my own child. She seems to have greatly altered, not to care much about pleasure or company, and in short I'm afraid, Geoffrey, it's a harder blow to her than—than— Well, the fact is, Geoffrey, I'm glad of a chance to free my mind to somebody besides Mrs. Remsford, poor woman, who is breaking her heart, too, I know, over this business. I know I can trust you, Geoffrey, as much as though you were my son."

"Indeed you can, Mr. Remsford. What you tell me is very distressing."

"Ah! if we could only between us manage in some way to pull Fenton out of his grief. If you could induce him to come to us. I know it would be such a comfort to poor Ada, and who knows but it would in the end be a blessing to himself."

There was a suspicious wateriness about the old gentleman's eyes as he spoke.

"I will, at least, make an effort, Mr. Remsford. But I must tell you I have already failed completely to induce him to come with me on a little trip to California. I did not then know as much as you have told me. I could not imagine what had come over George; but now, of course, it is all clear," said Geoffrey.

"When are you going away?" inquired Mr. Remsford.

"Next week," was Geoffrey's response. "And in the meantime I will do my best to promote the object of our confidential talk."

Mr. Remsford wrung Geoffrey's hand warmly, and said:

"Bless you, my boy. God bless you!"

CHAPTER XX.

- "Just like h'its mother."
- "And I say the very image of his father."
- "H'i don't see h'it."
- "Put on your specks, then. Anyone not stoneblind must say he has his father's eyes, nose and mouth and the same color of hair."
- "'Air!'air! Ha! ha!" (laughing derisively). "H'i should like to know where the 'air h'is, h'any'ow, h'on that little h'angel's 'ead? 'Ow can you talk of 'air when the h'infant 'as none h'at h'all but that little patch back h'of 'is 'ead, h'an' there h'ain't no color h'at h'all to that?"

- "None in your eyes, perhaps, Sally; but to me, who had his father hundreds of times in my arms—I mean when he was an infant—this baby's hair is exactly the shade of his father's then. God bless you, I remember it well."
- "Mrs. Jones, you h'ar' trying to h'impose h'on me."
- "Not at all, Sally. Don't you know the hair changes? As the babe grows, the hair takes a different shade. I have known fiery-red hair change to black at nineteen or twenty."
- "Laudie save us, Mrs. Jones, 'ow you do talk!"
 - "I'm telling you the truth, Sally."
 - "How you h'expect me to believe?"
- "Believe or not, as you like, Sally; it's God's truth all the same."
- "Well, H'i never!" exclaimed Sally, raising her hands in a kind of pious protest.

They were the best of friends, Sally and Mrs. Jones, but like all the well-regulated domestics, they found subjects of disagreement occasionally, and this was not the first time the two had had a little "spat" by reason of nurse's habit of "drawing the long bow," as Sally called it. Quite true was it that Mrs. Jones had served in the Sims family for a great many years—over twenty, in fact—but it was a big exaggeration what she had said about having nursed the present head of the house, Geoffrey Sims the second, and of having fondled him in her arms when he was a wee infant; nevertheless, it is doubtful if she did not really begin to believe it herself after all the repetitions. Sally was an English importation of Mrs. Geoffrey Sims

the younger, for of course it is not necessary to announce that during the years that followed the events narrated in the last chapter Geoffrey and Kate had become man and wife. To Sally's lot was to fall very soon the special care of the little infant Sims that had popped into daylight two weeks before, and Sally was elated at the prospect, for she loved her mistress fondly, and was prepared to dote on the innocent babe, if only for the sake of its adorable mother.

The chat between the nurse in esse and the nurse in posse was in the boudoir of their mistress, in the fine New York residence, in one of the most fashionable parts of New York, which Mr. Sims had purchased for their Eastern home. For they now spent part of each year in New York and San Francisco, and they had their own country seats in California and Rhode Island, where, "in the season," they retired in the way fashionable people always retire for rest. That is to say, the round of visits and entertainments was transferred from city to country, for there was no more rest in the one place than in the other, if rest is to be defined as simply giving up all social duties and burying one's self in rural idleness.

Baby Sims lay in the lap of Nurse Jones, slumbering peacefully, "like h'a little h'angel," as Sally Smith expressed it. The servants, during their self-interested confab, failed to notice that the door had opened softly and that Mr. and Mrs. Sims had paused for an instant on the threshold. Mrs. Sims, very pale and weak from the recent accouchement, leaned heavily on her husband's strong arm and rested her head fondly on his shoulder in delighted

contemplation of the pretty tableau formed by baby and the two faithful nurses.

"Dost like the picture, Pauline?" whispered Geoffrey, in the tone of Claude Melnotte. "Worth all the labor of your big walk, is it not, to gaze upon such a spectacle—eh! Katie?"

A closer pressure of the arm rewarded him. They walked together slowly toward baby.

Sally Smith jumped to her feet at once and ran to offer another arm to her mistress. Nurse Jones, who dare not stir, lest baby should be disturbed, beamed her own bright welcome.

"God be praised that you are up again, ma'am; and well and strong you look, too. And a fine, beautiful, strong boy he is, more be tokens, Mr. Sims.

God bless it, too, ma'am," exclaimed Mrs. Jones, from her chair.

The young mother's face flushed with pleasure and her heart beat joyfully when she saw her husband lean forward and raise the precious babe, all bundled up in spotless white, from nurse's lap. He held it cautiously to his wife's lips while he exclaimed:

- "There, salute his royal nibs, quick, for I'm blest if I'm sure how to hold it. Clumsy beginning, isn't it, nurse? Seems as if it might go to pieces in my awkward hands. Here, take it again, Mrs. Jones. I'm not to be trusted."
- "You'll learn soon enough, sir," said nurse, smiling. "But the angel is better cuddled up in bed now. Will I take it in, ma'am?"

"Yes, Mrs. Jones, and cover it up well," said the happy mother.

"Trust me for that," chuckled Mrs. Jones, who

walked off, followed by Sally.

Geoffrey placed his wife in an easy-chair, pillowed her up, and then sat on a low stool at her feet. Her hand played among the curly locks of his hair.

"How delightful to have you about again! Do you know, those two weeks were like a year to me?" said Geoffrey.

"Did you miss me so much, then—so very much?"

"I should think I did! What do you take me for to ask such a harrowing question? Miss you! I like that. But never mind, little wifey. I forgive everything. You may be as saucy as you like. Now that you are on your pins again you may abuse me to the top of your bent.

"'What care I, Oh! what care I?""

Geoffrey sang a few verses from one of his favorite songs and then turned to his wife again.

- "Soon, very soon, Katie, you will be able to travel, and we will make the promised descent on 'Frisco. Won't she be delighted to see you?"
 - "Especially our boy," added the wife.
 - "Yes, indeed."
- "Particularly when she finds it so like you, Geoffrey."
- "Come, that's cool now. Like me! How you must revel in poking fun at me! At the present moment our precious angel, as nurse calls it, bears

a stronger resemblance to one of those big pumpkins boys punch holes in for eyes and nose than anything else I can think of."

- "It has not much beauty at present, Geff, but—"
- "That's why you say it's so strikingly like its pa, eh, Katie?" interrupted Geoffrey.
- "But, I was going to say, it will grow better and better—"
- "Like it's papa again," once more interrupted Geoffrey.
- "Precisely," replied Katie Sims. "If he only grows half as good and—yes—I will say it—half as handsome, I shall be perfectly happy."
- "Oh, you little flatterer!" exclaimed Geoffrey, kissing his wife's thin hands with rapture. "I think I must have the best and blindest little wife in the world."

He stretched out his hand toward a little table on which were piled hundreds of letters and cards.

- "Look at that pile, Katie. What do you think it means?" he asked, guilefully.
 - "I couldn't guess, Geff. Tell me."
- "Why, congratulations, of course—congratulations on the great event—the birth of our young Prince Pumpkin, coupled with the rehabilitation of the queen, his mother," returned Geoffrey, who pulled the table over to the side of his wife's chair. "You shall read them all presently, when I go out—not now—for I want to talk of something else at this moment."
 - "What is it, my love?"
- "Do you suppose—mind, I'm not hurrying you; I'm not a bit impatient—but do you suppose you

will be strong enough to travel two weeks from today?"

"Oh! yes, dear—perhaps sooner. I shall get strength quickly now. What day of the month is this, Geff?"

"The 10th," responded Geoffrey.

"Two weeks from to-day, then, would be the—24th. Oh! Geff, the 24th of September."

There was a quiver in her voice and a shadow flitted over her beautiful face. Geoffrey sprang to his feet in alarm.

"You look ill again, darling. What is the matter? Have you exerted yourself too much?"

"No, Geff; it is not that. I was thinking of something. We won't start on that date, if you please," murmured his wife, unsteadily.

"The 24th—oh! yes—I see. Never mind, darling. Fix the date yourself. How thoughtless I have been," answered Geoffrey, looking penitently at his wife.

September 24th was the date of his unfortunate marriage with poor Sophie, and the remembrance brought sadness to both.

"Do you know, I'm superstitious about that date. Whenever it comes I feel unhappy, and I always fear some misfortune will overtake us. Isn't it strange?"

"Well, we won't talk of it, if you please. Let us think of something more cheerful," said Geoffrey, who immediately plunged into a lot of nonsensical chatter.

"What are you going to call the little pumpkin?" he asked. "Have you searched through the saints' calendar and settled on its name? How would Pompey do? Pompey Sims—just fancy that! Or Jupiter Sims—or Napoleon Bonaparte Sims—something great; or Julius Cæsar Sims—or Sam Slick Sims—or George Washington Sims—patriotic and euphoneous! Or, how would Pumpkin Pie Sims go? You know there is a decidedly aristocratic party in New York who was christened Preserved Fish. Pumpkin Pie Sims would be even more startling than Preserved Fish. What a row it would make among our friends in 'Frisco! An angelic pumpkin pie is not a bad idea, is it?'

His wife smiled at each extravagance. For the moment the shadow was gone.

"When you have completed your list of the sublime and the ridiculous I will tell you, Geff, what my choice would be," said she, finally.

"Out with it, Katie; it's sure to be something original, poetic and appropriate," answered Geoffrey.

"I would like to call our baby Geoffrey Fisher Sims, after my darling husband and my poor dear papa," whispered Mrs. Kate, throwing her arms about Geoffrey's neck in a sudden burst of affection.

"You little humbug!" said Geoffrey, delightedly. "I suppose had the pumpkin been of the female gender you would have named it Geofferina rather than Catarina, and for the same reason. Katie, you're simply a darling—my darling."

What trifles sometimes constitute domestic bliss!

He was still thinking of his wife's superstition some hours later, when he had gone out for some exercise on Fifth avenue.

"Somehow I am forever doing or saying things

that stir up unpleasant memories. To think I could have proposed the 24th of September!"

Then his mind went back to the Friday marriage—Sophie's superstitious unwillingness—her apprehension of some bad ending—the "governor's" stubborn persistence—and the solemnization of the ceremony on the famous Black Friday.

"Who shall say it is nonsense, after that? No marriage could have been more wretched—no two persons more unsuitable as wife and husband than Sophie and myself. And yet how lucky George was on the same day! Ah! well, it is a strange world. How apt we are to ascribe to superstition or some other absurd cause our personal disasters, which might have been avoided by courage and sagacity. Sophie and I were never suited to each other. I knew it before we were married, but I had not the courage to act as I felt."

Then remembering the last anniversary of the unfortunate marriage—September 24th—he could not help smiling as he thought of the strange excitement into which both he and his wife had been thrown by a mere nothing. They were at the theater promenading in the foyer during an interact recess, when his wife called his attention to a large framed picture containing the photographs of noted actresses. Geoffrey tried to avoid stopping before the picture, but his wife insisted.

"That is a beautiful face," she exclaimed, pointing to one of the photographs, and then turning to see why Geoffrey did not assent. She noticed at once the confusion and embarrassment in Geoffrey's face.

[&]quot;What's the matter, Geff?"

- "Let us walk on," answered Geoffrey.
- "Why?" demanded his wife.

She turned her gaze again on the picture and noticed beneath the face that had fixed her attention two words:

"Sophie Vernon!"

"Oh!" was all she could say as she hurried away with her husband.

She was very silent during the rest of the performance, and when the play was over and they were walking along Broadway toward their hotel a poor beggar woman suddenly accosted his wife, throwing her into an unreasonable fright. The woman had looked earnestly into his wife's eyes and then disappeared as suddenly as she had come.

"Oh! that look! that look! that look! It reminded me somehow of the photograph in the

lobby," his wife had cried with a shiver.

"What an imagination she must have! Poor Sophie! Seems to me the recollection of my first wife is destined always to bring a little cloud over present happiness."

He walked ahead rather more briskly.

"I'll hunt up George and make him promise to be godfather to Prince Pumpkin. That's what I'll do."

CHAPTER XXI.

GEORGE FENTON still retained his Wall Street office and occupied himself with finance. "Unlucky at love, lucky at play," was fully verified in his case. He had been extremely successful and was now one of the wealthiest and safest of the men who played with the fire of speculation. It goes without saying, too, that he had gradually worked out of the horrible spell of despondency in which we last left him. Time generally heals up all such wounds as he had suffered, and that his convalescence had advanced far must be taken for granted, since he had not only resumed his visits to the Remsford family, but had actually become engaged to Miss Ada. It is true he was not in love again, but he had a very strong affection for the little maiden, who seemed to worship the very ground on which he trod. He respected greatly her good parents also, and, on the whole, he argued it would be better for himself, as well as happiness for Miss Ada, to set up a home of his own with the young lady as its mistress.

On the same day that Geoffrey Sims was striding down Fifth avenue to hunt up the intended godfather, George Fenton was seated in his office, when a stranger was announced.

"My name is Horace Becham, of the Canadian police—in short, I am a detective from Montreal, sir, and my business with you, sir, is of the gravest importance," said the stranger, on entering the broker's sanctum.

SHIELDS

"Sit down, sir," said George Fenton, motioning to a chair with his elbow, for his two hands were busy with the tape that rolls over the gold and stock ticker, rolling out the varying prices and the latest little bits of news from all parts of the world. "Sit down, and make yourself comfortable for a moment—just one second," repeated Fenton, while he scanned the figures with the absorbed air of Wall Street during busy hours. "Now, sir, I am at your service," he added, wheeling around in his chair to confront his visitor; "what can I do for you, to-day?"

Fenton saw before him a queer, flashy-looking man in whose shirt-front glittered a big diamond pin fastened to a scarlet cravat. The coat, vest and trousers were of different patterns, but all what would be termed "loud"; a ponderous watch-chain hanging from the watch-pocket in the trousers was also "loud." The diamond ring on his little finger was decidedly "loud." A gold headed cane in his hand certainly bespoke a man loving display.

Fenton took in all these points at a glance, as well as the peculiarities of his visitor's physique—a keen, aquiline nose, a heavy lower jaw, a pair of bright eyes with a queer, cunning expression, a fresh, ruddy complexion and a strong, muscular frame. The impression he received from his one quick glance was that the man before him was not ill-favored, though probably vulgar—yes, and a trifle suspicious-looking.

At the question—"What can I do for you to-day?"—the visitor smiled oddly, and repeated: "I am a detective."

- "Oh!" ejaculated Fenton, who had not attended to the words uttered before by his visitor, and what business can a detective have with me?"
- "You are an intimate friend of Mr. Geoffrey Sims?" observed the visitor.

"Yes."

- "And you would regret any misfortune to him?"
 - "Decidedly," said Fenton, with sudden interest.
- "And you would do a great deal to ward off any misfortune to him?"
- "Certainly, Mr.— You have not favored me with your name," said Fenton, uneasily.
- "Horace Becham is my name, which I did mention before. You will excuse me for making the remark, but, be George, my name is well known in Canada and England in connection with the detective service and—"
- "You have some communication to make that concerns my friend, Mr. Sims? Will you oblige me by coming to the point without delay?"

Again Becham smiled in his queer way, and Fenton thought there was something sinister in the flash of the eyes and the curl of the lip.

"If unnecessary delay occurs, it won't be my fault, sir," said Becham, "but there are preliminaries that must be observed. Yes, sir, the business is of too much importance for haste."

"Then, in Heaven's name, out with the preliminaries," exclaimed Fenton, with some impatience.

"First, then, you must promise to regard my communication as confidential, no matter how deeply it may affect you or others."

"All right."

"Then you must tell me at once whether, supposing something serious—something dangerous to your friend were it to become known—and which can be prevented, I say supposing such to be the fact—you would be willing to pay handsomely for its suppression. Yes or no, sir?" said Becham, with a sharp, eager look.

"You may take it for granted I would make any sacrifice, percuniary or otherwise, for my friend's sake," answered Fenton, with a touch of

apprehension.

Becham and Fenton eyed each other suspiciously for a moment—Fenton with a vague alarm, wondering what communication his visitor could have to make, and whether he might not simply be some daring impostor; Becham, to see if he could trust this American gentleman with his valuable secret.

"Will you oblige me by proceeding?" observed

Fenton, not relishing such unusual scrutiny.

"Yes, sir; I feel sure I may trust you," remarked Becham, as if talking to himself rather than to Fenton.

"Then please proceed," said Fenton.

- "Your friend Sims is married, I believe?" remarked Becham, interrogatively.
 - " Yes."
- "And to his second wife?" demanded Becham.
 Fenton started, and a triumphant sparkle was
 emitted from the detective's eyes.
- "Really, I don't see what such questions have to do-"
- "Excuse me, they have much to do with the case, sir. I shall ask no unnecessary questions," answered Becham.

"Well, then, I cannot answer unless I know the object," said Fenton, in a tone that betrayed mistrust.

"Your hesitation is an answer, sir; it shows that Sims had another wife, and I may take it for granted, sir, that there was no divorce—"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Fenton,

jumping to his feet.

"Don't get excited, sir, it will do no good. Best way, sir, is to keep perfectly cool like me," said the detective, smiling in a patronizing way.

Fenton sat down again and waited. Becham

coughed a few times and then resumed.

"What I mean is that I know Mr. Sims was married privately to an actress named Sophie Vernon, supposed to have been killed in a railroad accident a few years ago."

"What do you mean, sir? What do you mean by 'supposed'?" cried Fenton, again rising nervously and regarding his visitor with astonishment.

"Pst! hush! Let us talk quietly," said Becham, with an air of caution. "You see I am talking with knowledge—not wildly, Mr. Fenton, and—"

"The lady whose name you mentioned was killed, sir. There is no doubt about that fact," observed Fenton.

The detective smiled in his odd way.

"I said 'supposed to have been killed' and I repeat it," said the detective, in a low tone.

"My God! man, you don't mean to insinuate a doubt—that she was not killed—that she is not dead?" gasped Fenton, turning suddenly as white as the immaculate blotter on the desk before him.

"Yes, I do," whispered the detective. "Now you understand why I ask you to talk low and cautiously."

"Great Heavens! what does this mean?" ex-

claimed Fenton, jumping to his feet.

"Listen to me, then, sir, as calmly as you can, and I will put the case in as few words as possible. Supposing his first wife to be still living, he being re-married, the fact would be most distressing, would it not? Its suppression would be most desirable, would it not? His present happiness, his wife's, his child's future—he has a child, I have learned—would be blasted by a disclosure. Is not this true, sir?" said the detective, whose keen eyes were fixed upon Fenton, watching the effect of each of his words.

The young broker was speechless with aston-ishment.

"I am aware, sir," continued the detective, "that this supposition must appear astounding to you, and I can understand your amazement and embarrassment. But you must admit that supposing what I have said to be the truth, the result would be disastrous if the truth—well, in plain words—if the truth cannot be suppressed."

"Certainly," gasped Fenton, dropping into his

chair with a tremor.

"But if it can be suppressed—if through my agency—by my skillful management—remember, no one else knows of this and no one shall through me—then—"

The detective paused. He seemed to expect some encouragement from Fenton, who was still too much bewildered to speak.

"Then, I repeat, the situation need not be so bad," added Becham. "What do you say?"

Fenton tried in vain to control the agitation which shook him. He tried to make some answer, but the words seemed to stick in his throat. He could only motion to his visitor.

"I see you are greatly distressed, sir, and I ask your pardon. Be George! I never could have dreamed my disclosure was going to have such an effect on you, sir. You could not look worse, if she had been your own wife, be George!"

"Stop, stop!" cried Fenton, at last.

"Take your own time, sir," answered the detective, placidly.

"This—this amazing disclosure—if—if it is really the truth, does overcome me so deeply that I am not prepared to answer immediately, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Becham, sir, Becham," interjected the detective.

"You are a perfect stranger to me. You come with the most astounding disclosure," resumed Fenton. "How am I to know that you are not mistaken?"

The detective smiled.

"I understand what you would say. Perhaps I am an impostor; perhaps I am only inventing this tale to swindle you or your friend. Isn't that it? My dear sir, do you think I could hope to make you believe unless I was ready with the proof—unless I was prepared to demonstrate beyond all possible doubt what I say? Remember, this step on my part is attended with great peril to me. It might mean my ruin, whether true or false, unless I can

rely on your honor as a gentleman. I do rely on it, sir."

Fenton was again startled at the clear way in which the detective read what was passing in his mind.

"Then tell me at once what is your proof?" asked the broker.

"Herself," answered Becham.

To save his life, Fenton could not repress another start.

"Would that be proof enough?" added Becham, who was now quite sure of his man.

"Herself!" repeated Fenton. "Herself!

"Yes, alive," said Becham, in a very low tone.

"Great God! can this be true? Oh! Sophie, Sophie!" exclaimed Fenton, in a voice that betrayed to the keen detective something of the truth as to the broker's own feelings toward the actress.—"Where is she, then? where is she? can I see her? Is she well?"

The detective was himself rather startled at the vehemence of his questioner, and hesitated how to frame his answers. It would not do, he thought, to tell too much all at once. He must first clinch some kind of bargain with this excited broker.

"I will tell you all I know, Mr. Fenton, but you must understand that on my part this affair is a business transaction. Pure business, be George, and the preliminaries must be settled before we go further," said Becham.

"You can take me to her—give me an opportunity to see her—to speak to her?"

"Cercainly, of course."

"Then have no fear about the preliminaries."

"That's all very well, you know, but, be George, it's not doing things regular, you see."

"What is it you want?"

"I want to be paid for my secret—well paid for the risk I run. You see it's a big risk for me."

"Speak plainly and at once. What is it you ask?"

"I want ten thousand dollars down, and I want to be—yes, I have a plan for looking after the the—girl—regular like—for which I would ask monthly allowances—"

"Yes, yes, we will settle all that satisfactorily."

"And you will pay me the ten thousand down—now—on the spot?" asked the detective, eagerly.

"I will pay you that amount the moment you lead me to her—the moment I am convinced she is alive."

The detective's face showed disappointment for a moment—but only for a moment. His brow cleared, and he answered:

"That's fair enough, after all. But I have your word of honor that I will be paid—that you will not take any unfair advantage of me, and that this conversation will always be confidential?"

"Certainly," was the quick response.

"Then I am your man. When can you come with me?"

"At once," answered Fenton, rising; "I will leave with you on the next train."

The detective's reply was interrupted by a knock at Fenton's door, and his clerk appeared, saying:

"Mr. Geoffrey Sims wishes to see you."

"In one moment. Ask him to sit down for one moment," said Fenton, excitedly.

The clerk disappeared.

"Not a word to him," said Fenton to the detective. "We must keep this affair strictly to ourselves. I will meet you at the Grand Central Depot, to-night, and will go to Canada at once. Now leave me."

In the outer room the detective took a good look at Mr. Geoffrey Sims, as he stood up to pass into the broker's sanctum. The look was satisfactory. He smiled and said to himself:

"I have a good thing in this, be George. Two fine geese to pluck, if I'm not very much mistaken."

His eyes wandered around the room and lighted again on two shining objects he had noticed on a book-shelf when first he entered. He was alone in the room, the clerk having accompanied Mr. Sims into the broker's sanctum. The detective took up one of the shining objects and examined it curiously.

"That's neat—very neat—some new pattern," muttered Becham.

He took the object to the window to inspect it more closely, and while thus engaged he heard the returning steps of the clerk. There was not time to get back to the shelf, so he thrust the shining object into his breast-pocket, and began to arrange his gloves when the clerk re-entered.

"Good-morning, young man," said the detective, calmly, as he passed the clerk on the way to the door, and then disappeared. "Queer-looking duck," soliloquized the clerk. "Wonder what business such a fellow would have with Mr. Fenton?"

"That was a d—d close shave," was Becham's thought as he descended the stairs. "And, be George, I don't know why I did the thing. It was stupid."

Out in Wall street he repeated:

"Yes, 'twas d—d stupid in me. All I had to do was to put the thing back in its place openly. And now, be George, I have pocketed what don't belong to me. And suppose he should miss it? Well, well, it's done anyhow, and can't be undone. He won't suspect me, even if he does miss it. But it was awfully stupid."

CHAPTER XXII.

Horace Becham's great secret had come to him by a lucky chance, as great secrets and discoveries often come to detectives who are popularly supposed only to reach such results by processes of deep thinking and adroit maneuvering unknown to the outside world. He was one day patrolling the streets of Montreal when he observed a crowd of young urchins following a well-dressed woman, whom they were annoying by irritating cries. Some, more venturesome than their companions, even pulled at the skirt of the lady's dress, crying out:

"Hallo, scar-face; let's have a look!"
The officer drove off the young scamps and ap-

proached the lady. She wore a thick veil, hiding her features, and walked somewhat unsteadily. Was she ill, or was she only a little the worse for liquor? He could not just then decide, as the lady made no answer to his inquiries. He followed her to the door of her residence. He saw her enter and go upstairs. There was nothing very wonderful thus far for a detective to labor over. But something had struck him about the lady the boys had called "scar-face," and out of pure curiosity he made inquiries of an old woman who entered the house a few moments later. She proved to be the servant employed by "scar-face." He asked why the lady was called such a curious name, and was told it was because she had received a scald at one time that greatly disfigured her right eye and one side of her face. He found out also that she lived a quiet, retired life, all alone; that she was well off, and did very much good among the poor of the city. It took a good deal of probing and some little sacrifice of silver coins to extract from the old French domestic the information that madame sometimes drank wine when she was "very, very sad, and then, vous savey, monsieur; well, what would you have, monsieur?"

What, indeed? thought Becham. Why should this woman, with plenty of money, be sad? he asked himself. "There is a mystery here. It may be worth my while to look into it."

He pursued a systematic plan of pumping the old domestic. He professed great interest in her mistress's case, and won the heart of the unsuspecting French woman by well-timed expressions of sympathy. Day after day, week after week, he

made it his business to waylay the servant and extract new bits of information. Early in his search he had discovered that madame, "in her cups," was in the habit of speaking of some marriage, evidently an unhappy one, and of letting out in her unconscious mutterings little pictures of her former life with a wealthy husband, and of a career on the stage. Had it not been for these chance hints. Becham might have abandoned his self-imposed investigations of the "Scar-Face" mystery, as he called it, after a few days' efforts. But these few early hints seemed to point to some unrevealed facts that might prove valuable. So he persevered, and little by little gathered together the fragments of a story which only needed names, dates and a few minor particulars to make it complete. But it was precisely these names, dates and minor particulars that would prove whether the complete story was worth something or nothing to a man of detective instincts.

He had completely blinded the old servant to his ulterior motive, and enlisted her warmest cooperation and sympathy by persuading her that, if she could at some time mock well and remember any names uttered by her mistress during her irresponsible mutterings, it might be greatly to the advantage of her mistress as well as to herself; that, in short, it might be the means of restoring madame to happiness and bring gold to herself. Thereafter the servant made a great point of listening attentively to the unconscious mutterings, which before she had avoided doing as much as possible. One day she did distinctly catch names and the incidents of a railroad accident, described

with such powerful realism that the servant trembled as she listened. When next Becham appeared the whole story, with names, was repeated by the servant. In the detective's hands, it proved to be the key to the whole mystery. He remembered distinctly the railroad accident, and the account published of Belle Sanders's death. Was it not possible that Belle was "scar-face"? But why should she conceal her existence, if she were really Belle Sanders? What motive could there be for that? It was true there were the mutterings about a secret marriage; but Belle Sanders was never known to have married, and all his inquiries as to the private life of the actress led to the same conclusion.

"I wonder if Sanders had some other name—if it was only a stage name? The theater people ought to be able to tell about that," concluded the detective, who looked over his memoranda of the scraps of information given to him from time to time by the old servant. "Sims, Fenton," he said. "If I could only find out who they are, now?"

He did find out—accidentally, again—about one of them, at least. This was through a paragraph in a morning newspaper, mentioning some big financial scheme in which the young millionaire Sims was supposed to be interested.

"Sims, the California millionaire!" exclaimed Becham, whose head fairly swam in the intoxication of the excitement raised by the thought that perhaps Belle Sanders and Geoffrey Sims had had "relations" in the past; perhaps they had been secretly married—perhaps the gay young

swell had arranged a make-believe marriage with the actress to quiet her scruples.

"In either case the thing is worth something," he wound up by telling himself.

He set in train quite a skillful series of inquiries relative to the antecedents of the "fair Sanders," resulting finally in the discovery that the name was only an assumed one—that Belle Sanders came from New York originally—that there was good reason to suppose her first name had been Sophie Vernon; then from this point he traced Sophie Vernon to Mrs. Sands and from Mrs. Sands to the intimacy of Geoffrey Sims and Sophie Vernon.

"That looks like a good chain," he exclaimed, but I must rivet all the links finally before I play my last card."

The riveting business was accomplished the very same day by a very bold move on the part of Mr. Becham. This was a letter, written by himself, asking for an interview with Belle Sanders. The envelope was addressed in a bold, round hand to "Mrs. Geoffrey Sims."

The detective handed this letter to the old servant, bidding her to deliver it to her mistress, while he sat down in the parlor to await developments.

A moment after the servant withdrew to the next room the detective heard a scream, followed immediately by the appearance of the mistress, holding his own letter in her hand, trembling from head to foot. The detective saw before him the lady called "scar-face." The right side of her face showed a great, red-shining mark, beginning at the temple, extending over the outward corner of the

eye, down the whole cheek and neck until it was lost beneath the collar of her dress. The general appearance of the huge, disfiguring scar was like that one sees sometimes on the face of a recovered small-pox patient. The left side of this lady's face, however, was scathless. There was not a mark upon it, and as, in her intense excitement, she moved her head from side to side, the contrast was most curious, almost laughable. The detective well understood at a glance why the street urchins derived so much fun from plaguing Mrs. "Scar-face."

"You—you wish to see me—me?" said the lady, breathing excitedly, and pointing her hand to her bosom.

"Yes, Mrs. Sims," quickly answered Becham. "You, and nobody else, madame. But there is noccasion for any alarm. I beg you to be calm, madame. Your secret is safe with me, Mrs. Sims."

"Secret! Secret!" echoed the lady. "What do you mean by such words? Why do you call me Mrs. Sims?" nervously asked the lady.

"For no evil purpose, be sure, madame, I am perfectly well aware of your true name, Mrs. Sims. I know all about Miss Vernon, and Miss Belle Sanders, too."

"Merciful Heavens!"

The cry was like that of a heart-broken woman.

"Oh! why can I not rest here in peace? Why cannot I remain unknown and undisturbed?"

"You are distressing yourself unnecessarily, Mrs. Sims. I have told you that your secret is safe with me. Accident has disclosed to me—an officer of the law, Mrs. Sims—your great secret,

and I do not come to give you trouble, but to offer my assistance—my advice—my sympathy. Peradventure, my aid and advice may be useful to you, madame. Yes, peradventure."

The detective used the word "peradventure" with the air of a man who had made some grand philological discovery, and waved his hand graciously in token of great patronage.

"I don't know what you mean, sir. I have never seen you in my life before, and I can't conceive how you or any other human being can serve me, except by leaving me to my own much desired obscurity," said Mrs. Sophie Sims. "I seek no aid, no advice, no sympathy. Why should you, a stranger, tender them to me unasked?"

"Mrs. Sims!" he began.

"I beg you will not use that name again," she said, hurriedly.

"Madame, I am an officer of the law. Do you pretend to deny to me that you are not Mrs. Sims?"

She began to sob hysterically.

"I implore you not to—to—torture me in this way. Tell me what you seek from me. If you are an officer of the law, what is your business with me? Why may I not live in peace and seclusion without the law disturbing me?"

"The law does not propose to disturb you, madame," replied Becham, soothingly; "only pure sympathy actuates me. I understand you wish to remain incog, and, so far as I am concerned, you shall remain so forever. But you must remember that to keep your secret you need to be very careful

yourself—never to—in fact, you must know what I wish to say—,"

A deep flush spread over the unscarred part of her face and neck. The officer's evident allusion to her own one fatal weakness and its probable consequences humbled her to the very dust.

"Forgive me for doubting your motive, sir," she murmured. "I see your intention was truly

Christian and charitable."

"Be George, you're right there, madame. You see now why I have come to warn you privately. The consequences to your husband, who, as you know, supposing you to have died, married another woman, would be very disastrous, indeed. They would destroy your own object—whatever it is—for remaining unknown in this way in a strange country. You will be careful, therefore, hereafter, and you will freely pardon my interference now that you understand my motive. Beyond the peradventure of a doubt, madame, you may trust me—me, honest Horace Becham of the Canadian detective force."

"Yes, I will trust you, sir," was her meek reply.

"And now, Mrs. — Mrs. — ah!—let us say madame—I will take my leave. Should you at any time need my services your servant will know where to find me. I shall give her my address. Allow me to take my leave."

Horace Becham, while returning to Canada in the company of George Fenton, outlined the main facts which we have given above, omitting, of course, such facts as might prejudice him in the eyes of the honorable broker. Long before the two travelers reached Montreal Fenton was fully convinced of the truth of the detective's story. It would have been utterly impossible for any mere impostor to relate some particular facts that Becham knew about the relations of Sophie, Geoffrey and himself.

What an extraordinary linking together of their three lives there had been! How disaster had followed disaster, drawing them together, driving them apart, and now reuniting them after so many years, just as though fate took a malicious pleasure in sporting with their most sacred ties and feelings!

"What is to be the end of all this misery?"
Fenton asked himself. "Poor Geff and his wife!
Poor Ada, too, and Sophie herself!"

He never seemed to think of exclaiming: "Poor me, too!"

Pure self was the last consideration with the white-haired, prematurely aged young broker of Wall Street.

CHAPTER XXIII.

How the wind whistled through the streets the phenomenally cold morning Fenton and Becham arrived in Montreal and trudged along the pavements with their ulsters buttoned up tight to their very chin just as though it were mid-Winter! Yet it was only mid-September, and they had left such genial warmth and gentle zephyrs in New York City only such a short time before. To the broker, Nature seemed to sympathize with the whirlwind of his own thoughts. The cold that bit into his very marrow was nothing to the icy shiver of his heart.

"What is this feeling that is over me? Is it the prospect of seeing poor Sophie, raised from the dead, as it were? Sophie bereft of her beauty-Scar-face Sophie? No, it is not that—Sophie could never be anything but the old bright and beautiful girl to me, no matter how time or disaster may have changed her outward appearance. It was her good, simple, trustful soul—the spiritual beauty within her, that I loved-not the mere exterior loveliness of face and figure, for to me there always was a true beauty of soul in spite of all the lightness and apparent thoughtlessness-something angelic which survived all the trumpery and artificiality of her surroundings. I think this horrible icy earthquake within must be the premonition of unseen disasters to come. What more, oh God! what more?"

The bright hotel fires could not thaw the frost

of his feelings, nor the hot coffee that he swallowed greedily warm up the cold blood congealing in his veins.

"Am I going to be ill now—ill when I need all my strength of mind and body?"

No, he was not going to be ill. He was only feeling that cold grip that sometimes holds the human heart before the dormant fires burst their bonds—like the sleeping volcano that suddenly casts off its pale mantle of snow and trebly firm barrier of ice.

The detective accompanied him to the hotel, but Fenton only bore his presence for the time needed in drawing a check. He no longer doubted he was about to meet Sophie face to face, and he threw Becham the promised check for ten thousand dollars.

"Now leave me, I shall not need your services until I have seen her—her. Then I will send for you, if I need you."

The detective's audacity was not strong enough to trifle with the broker's mood. He saw he was not expected to say a word—only to take his check and get off.

"He's a strange man. I'm not so sure I can manage him as easily as I thought. It would have been better if I had gone first to the other. He looked softer and more manageable. Well, there's one consolation anyhow. The other is always come-at-able if this queer one fails me. Yes, be George. I'm safe anyhow," thought the detective, hurrying away to his own home.

"If it were only over—if I only knew what I am going to do—whether I can trust myself," was

the burden of Fenton's thoughts as the hours chased each other by. He was growing colder and weaker every moment, he believed. Whether he stood over the blazing fire, or walked the floor of his room that horrible cold fastened about him with a tighter grip constantly. He could bear it no longer when the clock sounded its ten strokes.

"Ten o'clock! only ten. I can't stand it. I must get out—away—to her house—while I yet have force. Oh! God, keep me up till then."

He buttoned up his coat and faced the polar blasts again. But it was a relief. He was moving toward the goal; each second and minute brought him nearer. It was not far—St. Catherine street—and he was soon before the house he sought—inside the door—mounting the stairs. Then he paused, just as he had done once before long ago, when he visited Sophie after seeing her at the theater. He rubbed his two hands together. It was like the friction of lumps of ice, so cold was the contact. With a new shiver—a shiver like the ague—he knocked at the door. The sound had hardly died away when the door opened and he saw before him the old servant—the same through whom Becham had found Sophie.

"Is your mistress in?" He hardly knew his own voice.

Yes, sir; walk in. Who shall I say would speak her?"

"A friend; say only that."

Fenton's solemn visage, his cold, distant manner, the long, silvery hair flowing down almost about his shoulders, caused Regnier, the 11-

domestic, to class him as a clergyman. She told her mistress as much—a clergyman was waiting to speak with her; and Sophie, much astonished at such an unexpected visit, hastened to throw a veil over the disfigured side of her face, and, quickly fastening the strings of her loose morning gown, she entered the sitting-room. Fenton was standing examining a photograph over the mantel-piece—a photograph of Geoffrey Sims—neatly framed, and covered with a fine silk veil, which he had pulled aside.

"You wished to see me?"

He turned quickly and faced Sophie. She did not recognize him at once.

"Do you not know me?" he exclaimed, with a flushed face. "Do you not remember me?"

A puzzled face, then a gleam of recognition, a half-startled exclamation of surprise and fear, and she advanced a few steps.

"Can it be possible! Yes, it is you—George Fenton."

She stretched forth both hands and ran toward him. The veil fell from her face, and disclosed the hideous disfigurement.

"Oh! George, George!"

"My poor-Sophie!"

In a moment he was at her side and had taken her in his arms, pressing her to his heart. The cold feeling had gone, the ice had melted in an instant before the inrush of the hot, passionate blood now bounding tumultuously in his veins.

"Sophie! dear, dear Sophie! my poor child!" he cried, kissing her madly, as she rested unresistam in his arms. Unknown to him, in the wild,

feverish impulse that possessed him, she had fainted in his arms. The joy, the fear, the shame had robbed her of consciousness. When the truth flashed on him he cried out for help, fearing the shock had killed her. Her hands were icy cold, and there was no sign of respiration. Poor old Regnier, rushing in, rubbed the cold hands until heat came back again, and a faint sigh escaped from the bloodless lips. He had drawn her to the sofa, and sat down beside her with her head resting on his arm, when her eyes re-opened.

"Oh! George, George!"

"My poor, dear child!" he answered, gently pressing her head with infinite tenderness. "I have frightened you. Oh, forgive me, Sophie, forgive me."

All at once she seemed to realize her position, resting in George Fenton's arms, and released herself from his support. Embarrassment kept her silent until he spoke again.

"Have I offended you, Sophie? Are you displeased that I have come? Are you not glad to see me, your old—devoted—friend?"

She turned her head away and wept, but she gently pressed his hand, saying:

"Yes, George, I'am glad—very glad. Is it possible you can still like to see me—see me, so changed, this way?"

She pointed nervously to her disfigured face.

"My poor child. Do you think your misfortunes could change—my—my—feelings?" He was about to say "my love," but quickly substituted the milder word. "Ah! Sophie, you must think very meanly of me if you suppose that such a trifling circumstance could make any difference to me."

She put both hands to her cheeks, covering her face and turning away.

"To me, you are dearer than ever, my child. Don't turn away from me, Sophie. Don't fear to look at me. That little blemish is nothing to me."

"Nothing!" she murmured, almost inaudibly.

"Yes, my child, nothing. I could always love you, no matter how changed you might be. Do you not believe me yet?"

"I do, George. You must be the best and noblest of men, and the most considerate and devoted of brothers. I am grateful, oh! so truly grateful, Mr. Fenton, and grieved that I did not appreciate you better."

"Ah! you were wrong, very wrong, my child, to seclude yourself thus from all the world," he whispered.

"How could I think that anyone could care for me thus? How can you think that I could like to be seen by any of my former friends, so changed and——"

"Ah! Sophie, it pains me to hear you say such bitter things."

"I will not, then, since it grieves you. But how did you find me? Ah! I need not ask. It must have been through that good man—that Mr. Becham. But he promised not to do so."

"He did right, then, to break such a wicked promise. Listen to me now, Sophie. I have come here to take you away from all this sadness—to watch over you forever—to——"

"Oh! don't, George; don't speak that way. I

cannot go back to the old world—indeed I cannot. I am better as I am. It would have been far better if I had died in that fearful accident than to have survived as I am," moaned the poor girl, wringing her hands piteously.

"Listen to me, Sophie. I know how natural it must be for one like you to think as you do now. But it is wrong, almost wicked. Besides, you exaggerate. The little blemish which you have sustained is really of no consequence to anybody but yourself. I mean, of course, that it is unfortunate for you, because it makes you feel sad, but for your friends-for me-it only makes you more dear and sacred. You must not blame God for this visitation. After all, what is it compared to the misfortunes of others? But come, we will not discuss such a trifling matter further. I have come to carry you off, and I mean to do so, whether you consent or not. Do you suppose I will leave you again, now that I have found you? No, indeed, my child. But tell me how you hid away-where you went after the accident? I searched for you everywhere, and only found these-these little things which I have preserved ever since."

He took from his pocket a little leather case, which he opened, disclosing the scorched handker-chief and faded piece of the marked petticoat.

"Oh! my dear friend, how good you are! how truly devoted and loyal!" exclaimed Sophie, with a touch of tenderness and pity in her voice.

George Fenton interpreted truly. It was only the tenderness and pity for a hopeless love. He closed the little leather case sadly and restored it to his pocket. "Now tell me all," he said, resolutely suppressing every sign of the deep agony at his heart.

Sophie's account of her rescue was very brief and simple. She had been carried in an ambulance to the house of a clergyman some three miles from the scene of the disaster. There she remained for three days before consciousness returned, and then so extreme were her sufferings that they were obliged to administer anæsthetics again and again. She struggled on for over a week with only occasional intervals of consciousness. Then the crisis was over: she began to recover, and to distinguish the good people about her. They asked her name, and she gave that of her childhood.

"For, George," she continued, "my real name is not Sophie Vernon any more than Belle Sanders. Both were names adopted for the stage. My father was an Episcopal minister, of Connecticut—the Rev. Charles Wallace—and to prevent him from interfering with my love for the stage, I dropped my real name, which was Clara Wallace, and assumed that of Sophie Vernon. I had disappeared from home without giving any explanation, and I believe my father thought I was dead. From the time I left home until he was in his coffin I never saw him again. It was heartless, perhaps, but I wanted to save him from the humiliation and sorrow I knew he would feel if he learnt I had become an actress."

Sophie broke down at this point of her recital, and wept bitter tears. Fenton could only murmur:

[&]quot;Poor girl, poor girl!"

[&]quot;Well, I gave them the name of Clara Wal-

lace, and then when I fully recovered and found that I had become such a wreck-that people thought Sophie Vernon or Belle Sanders was dead -I thought I would let the impression remain. It was better than to go back and meet the shuddering aversion of those who had once known me as Miss Vernon or Miss Sanders. I may have been wrong, as wrong as I was even when a child to take up the career of an actress, leaving home and father and losing friends. I have had my punishment, God knows, but I am willing to bear it. You are the only real friend that is left to me in all this world."

He took her hand and tried to soothe her.

"Sophie-" he began.

"No, call me Clara now-Clara, always," she

interrupted.

"Well, Clara, if you will, but Sophie will always be the dearest name to me, my child. You are right in regarding me as your real friend, but there were others, too, whose hearts would always have been open to you."

"I know what you mean, of course, but, George, that was impossible; never could I see him again."

"And do you know the consequences of your silence? Have you heard what has happened since

your supposed death?" asked Fenton.

"Yes, but he is happy at last. I know all but too well, and that is another reason why I never can go back-never be seen where even yet someone might recognize me. You would not have me break up their happiness now-bring sorrow and shame to him and to her, and to all. Oh! George, George!"

The cry of despair showed but too well how deep and enduring was her old love still—deeper, perhaps, than ever by reason of her own self-immolation. Fenton had not thought of this aspect of the affair until it was presented to him by Sophie, herself. He had only thought of saving her—of seeing her and of forcing her to resume her old life with the esteemed matron in Westchester. Now he was puzzled to decide what to do. It was evident Sophie was as firm as ever, and would not consent to break up the new and happy home of Geoffrey and his second wife. Nor could Fenton see why that should be done.

"Only misery and shame to them without bringing happiness to Sophie," he thought. "But I cannot leave her here. She must come back with me."

Then he thought rapidly how easily this could be managed. Geoffrey need never know anything about it, and as he was only a short part of each year in New York, it appeared not to be so difficult to have Sophie in New York without the dangers of discovery.

"She must come back with me," he repeated, over and over again. "I could no longer endure life otherwise."

But in her then frame of mind he considered it would be impolitic to try to overcome the scruples and delicacy of her sensitive mind all at once.

"I must proceed slowly and cautiously if I want to succeed."

Arrived at this conclusion, he finally said:

"Sophie, this is all so sudden for you that I will not force you to a decision now. Take time to

think it over. But cast aside all morbid feelings. Look at the case like a woman of sense and good feeling. And remember, my dear friend, that in making your decision it is not necessary to take into consideration the chances of being discovered by him. There is no danger to be apprehended from that quarter. He could never recognize you."

The words were hardly uttered before he regretted them. He would have given worlds not to have said them. But it was too late. The shudder which passed through Sophie on hearing them told him what a fatal misstep he had taken.

"Yes, I know," moaned Sophie; "I know but too well. He would never recognize me even if I stood before him. Hideous disfigurement! Even the children on the streets know it and mock me. Oh! George, can you wonder that I shun the light -that I adopt this screen to my ugliness?"

The veil was again placed over her face with a shudder.

"I did not mean that, my child-indeed I did not. You misunderstood me," said Fenton, tenderly. "Come, we won't discuss the point any more to-day. I will leave you now, but you must promise—oh! ever so solemnly, Sophie—that you will not hide from me any more—that you will never go away or change your abode unknown to me-and that I may come to see you whenever I please. Promise me, Sophie, unless you want to plunge me into the deepest misery and despair."

"Yes, I promise and I will keep my pledge," she answered, gratefully extending to him her hand, which he raised to his lips with fervor.

CHAPTER XXIV.

EXTRAVAGANT, if not altogether unnatural, must have appeared to our readers the words and acts of George Fenton as related in the last chapter. How could a man rave over a poor disfigured girl like Sophie Sims? What love or passion could survive the wreck of mere facial beauty, under the peculiar circumstances we have seen surrounding the retired actress? If Sophie had possessed that higher beauty of moral strength, unspotted life, and all that sort of thing, we could, perhaps, understand the continuing infatuation of a man even like George Fenton, whose days had not been spent in the contemplation of abstract perfections, but in the realities of a career demanding very practical qualities indeed. But weak Sophie Sims, destitute of sufficient moral force to resist the temptations of wine-pshaw! the idea is absurd, we imagine some of our readers exclaiming.

Well, it might be answered to such critical observations that even so apparently improbable and extravagant things have happened in the history of the world. But, fortunately, we are not called upon to defend or explain away any such extreme situations. George Fenton had always discerned, or thought he discerned, beauties of character in Sophie invisible perhaps to the rest of the world. When the veil fell from her face, he certainly was shocked at the painful change wrought in the appearance of one whose face and form were formerly so ravishingly beautiful. But at the same instant

a great wave of pity swept through his heart, and impelled him to fold her in his arms with all the loving warmth he could have felt before. He did not understand this precisely, himself, as he sat by her side, and pleaded with her to be merciful to herself. But when he withdrew from her presence, it must be confessed there was a distressing reaction. It was not that, had she displayed any corresponding warmth, he would not have been prepared to make any sacrifice for her. He was certain he would have thrown every other consideration to the winds and have devoted his life to her happiness. But-well, she only felt toward him as a loving sister might have felt, andhuman nature is human nature, and George Fenton was only human nature, after all. He was shocked at his own revulsion of feeling and shocked that he had been able to part from her so quietly, and that the burning passion was dying in his heart.

Though he had protested to himself, and even to her, that nothing would ever induce him to leave Canada without her, he found himself now contemplating that very step without aversion. Everything had been thrown aside to hurry on to Montreal. He had neglected all his engagements—forgotten even that he was to have been a central figure at a grand dinner-party at the Remsford mansion the very night of his departure. How could he have been so neglectful? What would Ada think of him? Yes, Ada! A flash of shame—of downright anger with himself—accompanied the thought, for was it not the truth that if he had found Sophie's beauty unharmed, Ada's form

would not have obtruded itself at that mo-

"I am—or I was a detestable hypocrite. Poor, poor Sophie! Am I, then, only a worshiper of external beauty? one whose love is to be extinguished by an accident, which should make her dearer than ever to me?"

Such were his thoughts as he walked distractedly toward his hotel. But all the same, when he arrived there, the first thing he did was to write an humble letter of apology to Miss Ada Remsford, telling her that he had been called away suddenly, without a chance to notify her in time, and that he would be absent for a few days longer. The few days extended to ten, during which he spent much of his time with Sophie, earnestly striving to break down all her objections to returning to New York. All the impetuous ardor was now replaced by pity. He could not bear the thought of leaving her to the sad solitude of her Canadian life, with no companion but the faithful Regnier, and perhaps an occasional visit from the detective Becham, who did not improve on closer acquaintance. He would arrange a comfortable home for her, he said, somewhere near the city of New York, where she would be far happier and without incurring the risk of recognition by former acquaintances. "There I could watch over you, Sophie, and we could be as brother and sister again," he declared. But all his pleadings had only this result: she would think over it seriously, and perhaps when Geoffrey went away from New York on his customary trip to San Francisco she might consent to adopt the plan.

So the moment for parting came-parting as

brother and sister, Sophie weeping bitter tears, but firm in her resolution. Just before they separated she said, with a sob:

"You will never, never tell him? You will always conceal my existence from Geoffrey?"

"I must promise you that, Sophie, and I hope neither he nor she will ever learn of it, for your sake—as you wish it so intensely—and for theirs," answered Fenton, very gently.

"Is she very - very beautiful - his wife, I

mean?"

"She is very-very good, dear Sophie."

"Thank God for that. I wish him to be happy. To be good is better than to be beautiful. One lives always—the other soon dies," she mur-

mured, sadly.

"My dear child, your heart is breaking. Will you not come with me now? Think how much better it will be for yourself as well as for me—how much more contented and satisfied it will make me. There will be no danger of recognition. Put that thought away from you forever."

"No, no, no; it is impossible, dear George.

Impossible, impossible!" she cried, hurriedly.

"Sophie, I can't leave you thus. It would be cruel."

She dried her eyes at once, and made a wonderful effort to appear calm.

"You must go, my good, good brother. This is only a mere passing weakness. I shall be all right again after you have gone. And then, you know, you are going to write to me often, and I shall not be so lonely as before. You must not give up everything for me. I would be very selfish

and unhappy if you did that. Others must have claims on you, I know."

Fenton thought with a curious pang that "others" had claims indeed, but the wave of pity was again sweeping over him with something of the same force that he had felt before, and he hesitated whether after all he could leave the lonely, desolate girl in her awful solitude.

"Sophie, Sophie!" he cried, opening his arms.

"Good-by, dear George," she answered, embracing him affectionately. "You see how completely I trust and honor you. Go now, my dear, dear brother."

He kissed her then as a sister indeed.

"I will come back soon, dear Sophie—very soon. Be brave and—and good—good in the sense you spoke of just now. Good-by."

When he had disappeared she threw herself on the sofa and wept as if her heart would break.

"Ah! why did I ever meet Geoffrey? why, oh God! why?"

As for George, his own eyes were wet as he descended the stairs. The train for New York was soon to leave, and he hurried to the station.

How would he confront Geoffrey? was the thought uppermost in his mind all the time he was in the train. It appeared to him that his friend would read in his eyes the secret he had promised to conceal. If it should slip from him in an unguarded moment, what awful consequences would ensue! But why contemplate such an improbable contingency? Why should it slip? Sophie was a subject never mentioned between them. Each

always had his own reasons for avoiding it. Nevertheless, when Fenton retired to his little bed in the sleeper, and when slumber surprised him at length, it was of the disclosure he dreamt; that it had leaked out some way through his own careless management, and he awoke with a start in the middle of a distressing scene with Mrs. Kate Sims upbraiding him for the wreck of her happiness.

He could rest no more after that. He dressed and went into the smoking car, where he commenced cigar after cigar, until the train at last rolled into the Grand Central Station. It was a dreary, dusty day, the strong equinoctial gale that prevailed recalling the horrible sensations of his arrival in Montreal twelve days before.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed. "What a fearful experience that was!"

The dust circled in little clouds about him, almost blinding and choking him before he could get to the coupé, into which he jumped quickly. If it had not been for those cloud dusts, perhaps he would have seen some one striding by with a very grave face. It was, in fact, Geoffrey Sims, who had only a moment before emerged from the Lincoln Bank, and was crossing Forty-second street, bound for the railroad station.

"Give me a time-table of the Montreal trains," said he to the information clerk. He asked some questions after looking over the time-table, and then left, walking briskly toward Fifth avenue.

"I wish to God George was only here. I don't like this note from Montreal. Strange, too, that George himself should have gone there. What can it mean? Why should anyone have mysterious business with me there? I'll go down to George's quarters. Perhaps he has returned by this time."

He strode along the avenue with his firm, muscular tread—his fine, handsome figure attracting attention, as it always did, from men as well as women. He was soon in front of the old bachelor quarters, which he seldom visited now, and never without a melancholy recollection of the years gone by, and the pleasant comings and goings between Anderson's and the little hostelry where Sophie made her headquarters. His thoughts this day were more vivid than ordinarily on the subject of Sophie. Every little incident of the old life arose before him, and he almost felt as if the presence of the beautiful girl hovered about him in some mysterious way.

"Ah! dear me, what a pity it all was! Poor girl, poor girl!" he thought. "And it was all my fault—only mine. I was a shallow, thoughtless fool."

He rang the bell and asked if Mr. Fenton had returned. Yes, he had. Geoffrey hurried upstairs to the well-known rooms and knocked.

"I'm awfully glad you're back, old fellow, but what's the matter, George? You don't look well."

Geoffrey noticed the moment he entered the room George's alarmed start and the quick way in which he averted his eyes. Fenton himself also detected something unusually solemn in the appearance of Geoffrey.

"I'm quite well, Geff—quite. There's nothing the matter—absolutely nothing," answered Fenton, quickly.

"All right; but indeed you seem disturbed, and I won't deny that I am so myself. Look here," he went on, putting his hand in his pocket, from which he drew forth a letter. "I don't know what to make of this thing. It came to me this morning from Montreal, and I thought I'd show it to you before doing anything. I don't know the writer, and I can't guess his business. You will notice, the writer requests me to keep the thing shady—confidential is his word. But I don't recognize the right of another stranger to impose such conditions on me—especially when he makes no disclosures. Would you mind reading it before I say any more?"

Fenton took the letter and read as follows:

"MR. GEOFFREY SIMS,

"SIR—Certain information has come to my knowledge extremely important for you to know. It is of a character which will not bear delay and may cause serious trouble if not promptly attended to. It is impossible to explain by letter. Will you kindly let me know where and when I could see you alone? Address answer to

"Yours respectfully,
"S. HAMILTON.

"Box 4,180, Post-Office, Montreal."

"The infernal scoundrel!" muttered Fenton, between his teeth, and crushing the letter in his hand. Great as had been his determination to be on his guard always, this injudicious exclamation escaped his lips in the rush of hot indignation this letter aroused.

"Hallo! hallo! George. What's the matter? Scoundrel! Who's a scoundrel?" said Geoffrey, in wonder.

Fenton knew his friend's eyes were scanning his features, the angry expression of which he could not control; it was useless to try. There was no ready reply on his tongue, and the silence only impressed Geoffrey more certainly that there was some painful explanation to the mysterious letter which his friend would like to avoid.

"It's as plain as a pikestaff, George, that there is some painful mystery here, and that I was not mistaken when I read trouble in your face. Come, old fellow, out with the mystery at once, whatever it is. I can think of nothing which could be so dreadful as your face would make me imagine. Speak, George. If it's only those confounded Canadian bonds that you secured for me, why, man, I don't care a rush. How could you think such a matter would worry me?"

"No, it's not the bonds-nothing of the kind."

"Then what is it? Hang it, man, don't go on that way. Tell me at once."

"Give me a moment, Geff—just a moment to think," said Fenton, excitedly.

"That only makes the thing look worse."

A thought flashed into Geoffrey's mind and his face underwent a painful twinge.

"It isn't—it's not that—that her remains have been discovered after all these years? Is that it, George?" he asked, in a low voice.

"No, thank God—no—not that, Geff—not that," was the quick rejoinder.

"Thank God! you say 'Thank God,' and in

such a curious way. For Heaven's sake, don't beat about the bush any longer. Speak out, George."

Geoffrey was worked up to such a pitch of excitement by this time that Fenton could not think clearly what to say or do in a moment. His ordinary presence of mind was gone, and he found himself only repeating: "One moment, Geoffrey; one moment—one moment."

Geoffrey was completely overpowered by a vague dread, and he walked up and down the room excitedly, while his friend tried to collect his thoughts. Of what use would further concealment be? Fenton asked himself. Evidently S. Hamilton was only Horace Becham anxious to make another strike for money. Becham, he concluded, would be sure sooner or later to betray the secret. Why not explain all at once and have the agony over? He could be sure of managing his friend after the disclosure, whereas if it was left to Becham to make it, Heaven only could tell what rash act Geoffrey might commit in the first horrors of a realization of the truth.

"Geoffrey, my friend," he said, at last, "I have something very grave to communicate. I would like to have spared you the revelation. But I'm afraid it would be made to you sooner or later in some way. This letter by Hamilton is from a Montreal detective with whom I have been negotiating to suppress a piece of news which must plunge you into great unhappiness and—"

"Oh! George, don't—don't, for Heaven's sake, go on in that way. I believe I'm not a woman.

Tell me the thing at once. Perhaps I have already guessed the truth."

Geoffrey, in his desperate efforts to find a solution himself, had recalled his poor father's painful affair with Mme. Vernay. Perhaps that was the revelation Fenton considered so dreadful. On the other hand, Fenton supposed that Geoffrey really had partly guessed the truth, and in this belief he suddenly exclaimed:

"I believe you have guessed, Geoffrey, and I will no longer hesitate. It is a fact, Geoffrey—it is a fact—she is—alive!"

"She—alive! what do you mean? Not—not—Sophie!"

Fenton bowed his head.

"My God!"

With that one cry the young husband sank into a chair and buried his head in his arms.

Fenton allowed him to remain for some moments undisturbed. Then he placed his hand on his shoulder, gently, and asked:

"Shall I tell you all, now?"

He received no answer. Yet sitting down at Geoffrey's side he proceeded to tell the story of Sophie's rescue, recovery and life in Montreal under her maiden name of Clara Wallace. When he had finished, Geoffrey raised his head and displayed a face on which was depicted anguish and despair.

"What is to be done, George? What is to be done? In Heaven's name, tell me how we are to meet this terrible calamity. I am utterly incapable of thinking."

- "There is nothing for you to do, Geoffrey. You must leave all to me," said Fenton.
 - "But this man Hamilton-the detective?"
- "I will deal with him. I know a method of enforcing his silence. He is in my power. What I would advise you to do now is to leave here at oncego to California—abroad—wherever you like. But don't breathe a word of this to a human being, and leave the rest to me."
- "Oh! my wife! my poor Kate! and this day!—George, do you know what day it is? The 24th of September—the anniversary of my marriage with poor Sophie!"

CHAPTER XXV.

It was her first real season in London, for though she had visited the great center of Anglo-Saxon refinement and fashion before, and even with Geoffrey just after their marriage, it was as the fresh young bride in the blissful enjoyment of a perfect honeymoon. What did she or he care for society then? So this was really Kate's début in the London world of fashion. The little glimpses she had caught beneath the curtain while traveling with Geoffrey's mother were as nothing to what she beheld now. London in the very zenith of its cultured life! As wife of the great young millionaire of California and New York the icy barriers of social exclusiveness melted away. For in London the golden passport is as powerful as elsewhere, but when the golden passport is in the hand of beauty how much more readily swing open the ducal doors and even

the gates of the greater palaces of royalty. After due presentation to her majesty by the American minister, Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Sims became welcome and honored guests everywhere. Was not Mrs. S. beautiful, amiable and clever? Assuredly she was. And was not Mr. S., the great millionaire, who could buy half the dukedoms of the kingdom of her majesty, were he so minded? Equally certain was the fact, or at least nobody seemed to doubt that Geoffrey's uncounted millions could almost match those of Rothschild himself. Yet both husband and wife were really welcomed for their own sakes, when they became known in the charmed circles. There was a purity, freshness and natural refinement about Kate Sims that attached to her and held firmly the admiration and friendship of the best in the land. As to Geoffrey himself, the cold reserve in which of late he had wrapped himself-a reserve that had begun to grow even before he went to the haunts of fashion -was regarded as aristocratic and good form. It raised him above the plane of ordinary millionaire débutants, and proved that he must have some of the real old blue blood in his veins. To his wife this reserve was not so attractive as the playful, joyous, light-hearted ways she remembered so well and regretted so much. Not that there was any abatement in tenderness or devoted attentions on his part, but now they were always marked by a sort of sad, respectful manner that puzzled her. She joked him sometimes about this and called him grandfather, and then he would exert himself to shake off the new mood, but there was always a quick relapse. Gradually she became accustomed

to the new manner and ceased to joke or protest, especially when she noticed that he really appeared to be more at ease when no notice was taken of his peculiarity.

"I suppose all husbands change their manner after awhile, and so long as I know he loves me truly, I have no right to tease him about it. But I do wish he would be more like his old self—cheerful and jocose—not so dignified and respectful," thought the young wife.

He encouraged her life of gayety, but too well pleased to have close attention drawn from himself. But there was neither diversion nor rest for him. Amid the splendors of London's drawingrooms, the secret fears that possessed him poisoned all enjoyment, and kept him in a constant state of expectancy that exposure would come, and end in shame and humiliation to one who was dearer to him than life itself. Oh! the horror of that rocking, ever-present dread! Kate, the pure, nobleminded mother of his boy, and yet not the real wife in legal view! What would she do, were the truth kuown? Would she leave him-fly from him? Would she despise—hate him? And Sophie, poor abandoned Sophie, alone, wretched, wearing out her young life, far, far away-freely sacrificing herself for his sake!

At times such thoughts wellnigh crushed him, and drove him to the verge of despair. They began to tell on body as well as mind after awhile, but the change was so gradual as not to be observed even by the watchful eyes of the loving wife. It was only by accident the truth was finally brought home to her.

One night at a crowded reception at a ducal mansion to which Geoffrey had escorted his wife, while he was moving about in his silent, abstracted, brooding manner, he was aroused by hearing someone calling after him.

"Hallo, Geff!"

On looking in the direction of the voice, he espied Dr. Webb, one of his old college chums, making his way toward him.

"How are you, Charley?" exclaimed Geoffrey, with some of his old-time animation, and shaking the young doctor's hand heartily.

"Great Heavens! Geff, what is the matter with you, old fellow? So thin and wretched-looking. Is this London whirl too much for the nerves of a young giant like you? If not, what then, old fellow? I don't like your looks a bit. Upon my word you have all the outward symptoms of mental sufferings. Excuse my bluntness, Geff, but I could not help it, no, indeed—you look so terribly altered for the worse."

Dr. Webb's scientific eyes were quick to note the sudden evidence of pain and uneasiness his remarks occasioned.

"There is something wrong with you, Geff," he added, "but nothing serious, I hope." To himself the doctor said: "It is mental—mental worriment. I wonder what can trouble a man so happily fixed as he is."

"Yes, there is something wrong with me," Geoffrey said, "and I may have to consult you about it."

"I hope you will, old man. Perhaps I can help to relieve you."

Then the young doctor quickly changed the subject. He was a distinguished specialist on nervous diseases, this young Dr. Webb, whose fame had even spread to Europe, and he was too wise and experienced not to observe that it would annoy Geoffrey to dwell on the subject of his ailments at that time. But he found an opportunity, when in due course he was honored by a presentation to Mrs. Geoffrey Sims, to drop into her ear a few judicious hints about the state of her husband's health. The effect was instantaneous. Forgetting all her engagements, she hastily made her way to Geoffrey's side and surprised him by asking to be brought home.

"Why, the affair isn't half over!" he exclaimed.
"Are you not well?"

"Oh! yes, but I'm tired. Come along. I want to go."

Geoffrey obeyed with alacrity, and was struck by the unwonted silence of his wife and the loving way she clung to his arm all the way home in their carriage.

He had hardly time to slip into his smoking den and light a cigar, when his wife appeared before him looking into his eyes with an anxious, nervous scrutiny he had never noticed before.

- "Geoffrey, my dear unselfish husband, can you ever forgive me?"
- "Forgive you! Why, child, what do you mean?"

He regarded her with a puzzled look.

"Oh! I have been so thoughtless—so neglect-ful—so blind! My own love, and you growing ill under my very eyes without notice, sympathy or

attention. Oh! Geff, what is the matter, darling? For there is something the matter now. I see it too late, my darling."

Kate Sims had her head between her two hands gazing into his face with love and tender pity.

"How could I have been so blind!" she added, suddenly bursting into tears and throwing her arms about his neck.

"Nonsense, Kate. What has put this ridiculous notion into your head? I sick? Why, darling, I am in perfect health," said Geoffrey; but this assurance only made her shake her head and cry "No, no, no," in heart-breaking accents.

He took her into his arms like an infant, and endeavored to console her by caresses.

"It is some curious mistake," said he. "Why do you think me in such sad plight now any more than yesterday?"

Then Dr. Webb's startled inquiries recurred to him.

"Ah! I see, Kate, it is that young doctor's work. He has been filling your mind with those absurd fancies," said Geoffrey. "Confound him, I wish he would mind his own business."

"Ah! Geoffrey, I am so grateful to him. Don't blame him, my love," replied Kate, checking her tears and again looking full into her husband's eyes, anxiously. "I'm going to stop all this society business at once, Geoffrey. Your health must be attended to, and—and—my darling husband—I think we must close this house and return to California."

"Why, Kate, what wild nonsense you are talking. Close this house and rush away in the mid-

dle of the season! End all your new pleasures in a moment, merely because an officious young doctor frightens you!"

"Never mind. I hate them all now. I only think of your health. With mother, and in your own native climate, you will soon get back all you have lost, won't you, my love?"

"And do you think I will permit such a sacrifice, you little alarmist? Besides, I don't want to return to the States, dearest. For many reasons I prefer to remain here."

"You must come back, Geoffrey—you must—you must—or my heart will break. Oh! Geoffrey, pardon, forgive me—forgive me."

And again the young wife gave way to an uncontrollable fit of weeping, which only ceased when Geoffrey's promise was given to leave at the earliest possible date for the far distant home on the Pacific.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was soon noticed by the associates of Horace Becham that he was "flush," so to speak. He had plenty of money, and was launching out into extravagances scarcely befitting a plain member of the Canadian police. He was growing careless, too, in the discharge of duties, so much so indeed that one day his superior felt compelled to reprimand him.

Horace tossed his head in the air defiantly, and remarked with unnecessary heat:

"I don't care a rap for my position. You can have my resignation."

"I understand, Becham, you have other means of support, and now you don't value the position," remarked his superior, calmly; "but whether or no, please consider your resignation as accepted from this moment."

"I thank my stars I don't value the position. I can make more money on my own hook," retorted Becham, who, nevertheless was taken aback by the alacrity of his superior.

"The fellow has made a pile somehow, I can see that. Well, it's none of my business, anyhow, but I don't like his manner, and there's something about him that is not satisfactory, somehow," thought the chief. "He will bear watching, or I'm mistaken."

But all the watching developed nothing startling. It was only evident that somehow Becham was in receipt of large sums of money, and was prospering so well that he began to play the rôle of a smart man-about-town. He became very attentive to a French woman, which excited in about equal degrees the mirth and envy of his former associates. She had come from no one knew whereappeared suddenly like a meteor flaming in the streets of Montreal for awhile, and then snuffed out as suddenly by Horace Becham. That is to say, he appropriated her brilliance for the adornment of his own establishment. No one would have called her a beauty, but she was stylish and dashing, and-she was French. She became his housekeeper.

The Becham establishment was a snug little

house, neatly furnished in a respectable part of Montreal. Mme. Charlotte put a few touches to the interior that decidedly improved the general aspect of things from an artistic point of view, and raised her greatly in the estimation of her Horace. Very soon, in a quiet way, she gained a tremendous ascendancy over Becham, and little by little she grew to know most of his secrets. But not all. There were two points on which she found the exdetective hard as flint. He would not disclose to her the secret of his sudden wealth, nor would he listen patiently to her suggestions on the subject of matrimony. He said to her very bluntly:

"I want no wife—never shall I tie myself everlastingly to any woman."

But he little knew the sort of woman whom he had installed in his house, and, much as he had seen of the darker sides of life, he had failed to learn the important truth that once a man makes a woman his confidante she is bound some day to overreach him. She will gain the upper hand or—she will break with him altogether.

It did not suit this particular woman to break with her man. She preferred to watch and wait; and watch and wait she did until the long-looked for opportunity arrived.

Becham returned to his abode one night after an unusually long revel with some new acquaint-ances from the States. He was rather under the influence of stimulants, and decidedly unsteady on his legs. Madame had retired, the servant told him, and he was glad to know it, for he preferred to stretch on the parlor lounge and sleep off some of the superfluous stimulant before mounting to

his customary couch. He was soon in semi-forget-fulness, half sleeping and half waking, and—thinking aloud. A very bad habit for anybody, but particularly so for an ex-detective primed with weighty secrets. Madame was soon within listening distance, unseen, but very attentive and alert. People who thus listen seldom hear good of themselves, and madame was destined to prove no exception, as witness this snatch from the mutterings of Horace Becham:

"Ha! ha! she's a regular born detective— Charlotte is. Ought to be on the force! Ha! ha! Thinks she knows everything, but she doesn't. No, be George. I'm not quite so 'fresh' as all that. But I'm not going to stand any more of her pumping. Ah! if she was only like that Sophie, now—Sophie Vernon—how safe I'd feel. That's the kind of female women to have—no questions—no nonsense—no bother don't care about money, either—what a treasure Charlotte would be with Sophie's virtues."

"Sophie Vernon!" muttered the woman. "Who is she, I wonder? Ha! ha! another lady for Horace. I will see."

"That was a good trick—ha! ha!—getting such a nice pile out of Fenton and then having the handling of the monthly allowances. Ha! ha! Horace, you're a match for them all. The fellows wonder at my luck—think I've struck a gold mine somewhere. And so I have; a regular mine, be George—the Sims-Fenton mine."

Becham still pronounced "by" like "be," which was one of the hardest of his early habits to shake off.

"She would like to know all about it. Ha! ha! Yes, be George, she would. Ha! ha! But I'm not such a fool. Tell her? See her blowed first, I would."

Much more he muttered before sound sleep silenced thought and voice. Then madame stole back, stealthily as a cat.

"Sims! Sims! he said Sims. How strange! and Sophie Vernon! Those two names and the secret of his money are bound together. That's sure. And he was mocking me of my curiosity! Yes, Horace Becham, you were laughing at me. But we will see now if you can laugh alone so very much longer!"

The French woman standing before her mirror saw on her own face a malicious smile—a smile in which hate and triumph were blended.

"You are not pretty when you are mad, Charlotte," said the woman, looking at her reflection in the glass. "No, truly not, and Horace would not like to see you at this moment. Ha! ha! ha! ha!" (laughing). "Well, we can be mild and modest and innocent in face, too, Charlotte. That's one comfort. He said Sims distinctly. Can it be Mr. Geoffrey, that foolish young Californian? It must be. Who else could furnish money so recklessly? And what is this about the Vernon—Sophie? Ah! there is something there—yes, something I must find out. But how? Ah! I do not know yet—not yet—but it will be very strange if I do not get the rest from him, when I know so much already."

Charlotte Deshon, this French woman, rubbed her hands together gleefully as she turned from

the mirror and walked toward her bed, muttering:

"I like this. It is exciting. He calls me detective. Ah! I will try to show I deserve it. Mr. Horace Becham, you should not make your fun of me. It is not well, for it makes me wish to make a little fun for myself."

When Becham appeared at his breakfast next morning, he was as ruddy and refreshed to outward appearances as if nothing out of the way had happened. Mme. Charlotte Deshon made no remark about his condition the night before. As far as Becham could see, she looked rather better and was more attentive than usual to his little wants at the table.

"Did you see the lady who called here for you yesterday?" asked madame suddenly, with sparkling eyes. "Very pretty lady, too, but a little pale."

"Lady? No, who called?"

Becham looked up and thought, "She's a little jealous. Good," and he could not help a feeling of elation.

"Her name—let me see—if that I can remembair. It was Ver—Ver—Sophie Ver—non. Yes, that is it," said madame.

Becham let fall his knife and fork. His self-satisfaction vanished in a moment.

"She here?" he cried, aghast.

It was no use. He could not control his excitement.

"Yes, she-"

"The devil you say!" roared Becham, "and you—you spoke with her?"

"A leetle—a leetle," was the answer.

Becham saw a gleam of triumph in her eyes, as she said:

"If your ladies come, and you are not here, I must see them, and if they talk——"

"You have no right to pry into my affairs," roared Becham. "I have forbidden you to talk on that subject, and I'll not have you meddling—"

"Ah! you forget yourself. Never have you named that lady to me. Never have we had one word about her. I did not see her in my life before. But the Mr. Sims—"

"Sims! Sims! She spoke of him, too!"

Becham abruptly rose, upsetting his chair.

"Ah! do not so disturb yourself. I was only going to say the Mr. Sims I have heard of and seen before," said madame with irritating calmness.

"Thunder and lightning!" exclaimed the astonished man, walking up and down the room in great agitation.

"I see—I see. You know all. You have discovered my secret. Devil take it. You—you have—"

He stopped in front of her and suddenly changed his tone to one of conciliation.

"Look here, Charlotte, I suppose I am in your hands. You have found out something I wanted to keep dark and——"

"Ah! you need not fear. I am your devoted friend. Do you not know it?" interrupted madame, cunningly. "It is better we have no secrets. You know all mine. Why will you hide any from me? I can help you. We can always help each other."

Had he possessed half the caution ordinarily displayed by him in the game of baffling, he would not have fallen headlong into the snares laid for him by Mme. Charlotte Deshon. But he was so staggered by the rapid thrusts, delivered with such artful precision, that he jumped precipitately to conclusions from which a little coolness and a few guarded questions might have saved him. Believing that the woman had wormed out of Sophie the most important facts of her dealings with him, Becham concluded that his best policy was to make a virtue of necessity and bind Mme. Charlotte to him by making a clean breast of the whole business.

"She'll find out all for herself if I don't tell her and then defy me," he thought.

And it was astonishing how adroitly she contrived to hide from the keen detective the fact that she had only two names, and really knew nothing more about his great secret. When he finished the revelation of all, she calmly looked at him and said:

"What you tink now, when I say you that ze lady was not here at all? Horace, you are one grand goose."

"What!" roared Becham.

"Yes, you are one grand goose. Listen me. Why did you not tink ze Sophie would not have said me she was Sophie Vernon? Why did you not see I make one, oh! so great mistake to say she very pretty? An' you did know she have so ugly face? Have I not right when I call you grand goose? Not you the eagle!"

"Woman, what does this mean?" he fairly yelled, clenching his fist.

"It mean dat ze woman—she tole me notings—she was not here—you—you it is who tole me all I know. Ha! ha!"

Rage, ferocious rage, blazed in his face for a moment, scaring the scornful smile from her face and causing her an inward tremble. But she never lowered her gaze before his fierce look, and he ended by sitting down with a groan.

"Zat is bettair, Horace. Ze grand fureur is not ze way for me. But we muss friens be, Horace. I only wish to show my Horace zat I am wordy for be ze detective vife. Is it not so, Horace?"

Becham started.

"Yes, better it is we marry, Horace. Ze vife, she alvays garde ze secret."

He jumped up again, glared at her like a wild bull, and then rushed out of the room.

"Ha! ha! ha! Safe I am now, I tink. He will marry sure. He must."

And cunning Mme. Charlotte Deshon struck her thin, long hand on the table with a determination that it was well Horace Becham was not there to see. He could never have married the woman with the savage expression Charlotte Deshon's face wore at that moment.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MEANTIME George Fenton was faithfully running between New York and Montreal, watching with true brotherly interest over the welfare of his afflicted charge. But after months he had not yet succeeded in inducing her to leave Montreal, though he had brought some sunshine into her darkened life. Like a good physician who tries to coax his patient's mind from the dreaded malady, so Fenton contrived a healthy distraction to her morbid mind by fostering in her a taste for reading and study. On his second visit he ransacked the bookstores of Montreal for appropriate reading matter and opened to her a new world of contemplation. Up to that time she had done very little general reading. Now, however, she began systematically, under Fenton's guidance, and it amazed her how quickly time flew. The broker saw with delight signs of a very great improvement in her spirits. She was no longer always sad and brooding when he surprised her with a visit. She could smile at times and show by her conversation how eagerly she had read and absorbed. It seemed to him, too, as if the facial disfigurement was actually softening and fading away with the intellectual expansion. But he mistook the glow of interest that illuminated her face during the talks about books and the discussion over subjects that chiefly attracted her, for what it were not. It was only the transient flashes of soul that sometimes light up the ugliest faces, making

one forget the physical defects and only see the reflections of beautiful thoughts.

"She is toning up—toning up," Fenton exclaimed with delight after one of his visits.
"There are happy days yet for the poor girl."

If only George could have been always at her side or near, all would have gone well, perhaps. But George could not, and, unfortunately for him and her, just at the time when his brotherly protection might have been most powerful in averting ill, fate held him elsewhere. Fate in this case took the form of little Miss Ada Remsford, who did not like the frequent long absences of her intended husband in Canada. Why did he go there so often? What was the business that required him at least twice every month to visit Montreal? In Ada's mind that provincial city was associated with disaster to George Fenton. For she had learned from her father enough of the sad story of Belle Sanders to know that it was from that city George had conducted the beautiful actress to New York. With a young lady's inconclusive logic, she declared to herself:

"If he had never gone to Canada at that time—after the awful railroad slaughter—he would not have lost his beautiful hair."

At least it was almost as bad as if he had lost it, for was he not now a gray-headed young man—sad and solemn-looking, whereas he might still be happy and light-hearted as before—if he had not gone there?

When a young lady affianced to a young gentleman begins to worry over the unexplained absences of her intended, there is but one conclusion to be expected. Inevitably it is a jealous fit. In Ada's case pride prevented her from confessing the truth even to her mother, until the mother herself, observing how her daughter always pined and worried during Fenton's absences, shrewdly guessed what was the matter. Then Ada tearfully confessed.

This was why George Fenton omitted one of his customary visits to Canada and then another, until a month elapsed without seeing Sophie. Let it not be supposed that Mrs. Remsford or Ada had breathed the faintest hint of suspicion to George Fenton, but whenever he proposed going away there were so many objections and obstacles interposed by the one lady or the other that he found it easier to postpone than to insist.

Meanwhile trouble was brewing for Sophie. Mme. Charlotte, now wife of Horace Becham, began to concern herself very much with the Sims-Vernon branch of her husband's shady transactions. It was the most promising of all his affairs in her opinion, but she had a mean opinion of his ability to make the most of his opportunities, and she determined to show him her own superiority by managing this one herself.

"You muss present me to miladi Vernon, Horace," she said, coolly, one morning during breakfast. "I can bettair to that affair than you."

And though Horace really feared that Fenton and Sophie herself would resent the introduction of any new party to the confidential transaction, and make a disagreeable scene for him, he was obliged to yield to the keener and more determined will of the woman, who now thoroughly mastered him.

- "I will manage dat miladi will not displease herself that I go to her. Leave all zat to me, Horace. You know nevair I make mistakes. Is it not so?"
- "D-n it, Charlotte, I only know that when a business is doing well, it's better to let well alone," he answered.
- "Well! Bah! It is not well. You are what I tole you before—a grand goose, Horace. Dis business is not well. I will show you soon how it can bettair be," she answered, contemptuously.

"Have your way, then. But remember this is against my judgment."

This happened about the time when the regularity of Fenton's visits was interrupted. Sophie always looked forward to his arrival with something of the longing of a hospital patient. In a way she was no better off than a sick person confined in an infirmary, who must await her friends and relatives because going to them is not permissible. Sophie spent her days reading and studying. Her nights were given to walks with her faithful attendant, Corinne Regnier. As the time drew near for Fenton's appearance, Sophie always became excited. When he came she was unaffectedly happy, and showed it. The discontinuance of his visits suddenly, without knowing the reason, sadly affected her spirits. He was the outside world to her-from him she learned about all those in whom she felt an interest-with him it was such a deep pleasure to converse about all the subjects of her reading and study. He was, in short, the true brother whose sympathy and love could always be depended upon. Was he ill? God forbid.

She grew sad and sick at heart from disappointment, and it was just during this period of mental distress that Mrs. Horace Becham artfully insinuated herself into Sophie's confidence. The cunning French woman swept away all grounds of objection to the obtrusion of herself on the scene by professing deep anxiety about the state of the girl's health. Her Horace had told her miladi was sick—miladi alone and suffering! Mon Dieu! how could she stand on ceremony in such a case. She had rushed to offer her sympathy and assistance. Yes, and miladi must let her be as a mother to her. Yes, indeed.

"Tell all you want, miladi. All I can do I will, with ze cheerful heart."

Sophie's was not a suspicious nature, and perhaps if she had been of the cautious kind the overwhelming effusiveness and protestations of sympathy shown by Mrs. Becham would have made cold repudiation of the proffered kindness seem ungenerous to her.

"Here is a warm-hearted, impulsive French woman," Sophie thought, "who offers me sympathy and companionship. Why should I reject them? My misfortune is sacred in her eyes, and perhaps she can help me."

The French woman had formed her own estimate of Sophie's nature from the accounts given her by her husband, and she won the girl's confidence at once by the assurance that much could be done to remove the terrible facial disfigurement.

"Yes, my dear, you should a doctor have seen before," exclaimed Mrs. Becham.

Sophie shook her head sadly.

"No, you do not like ze doctairs. I do not meself. But I can do much, vera much, miladi, for the face."

Her "vera much" consisted of the application of certain ointments which she persuaded Sophie to try.

The first successful step had been taken. She had captured the girl's confidence easily, and she flattered herself that the rest would present as little difficulty to a woman of her artful nature. And she was right. Little by little she found out from Sophie all the information necessary for her object.

"Horace, miladi she is vera sick. Have you tink what is it you will do if she dies—how much we lose? There will no more be ze monnier evair month," remarked Mrs. Becham to her husband on returning from one of her visits to Sophie.

She had found the poor girl really ill as well as very much excited—both the result of the suspense and anxiety caused by the discontinuance of Fenton's visits.

Becham started.

- "You don't mean to say you believe her in any danger—real danger?" he asked, uneasily.
- "Mon Dieu! how know I? Certainment she is very sick and miladi you know is delicate. She could not much sickness support, Horace. What if she die?"
- "Oh! well, even then it is not all over, old girl," rejoined Becham, brightening up. "They would still want us to lay low, you know."

"Lay low! What is 'de lay low'?" asked his wife.

"I mean they would not want us to make an exposure, anyhow. They would still pay to hush up. Don't you see?"

Mrs. Becham did not join in the triumphant smile with which her husband said the words.

"I tink I, Horace, I get all that is possible now. I would not wait," she said.

"What in thunder do you mean by 'all' and 'now'? I don't understand. You'll have to plump out square and flat, be George. What devil's scheme is working in your brain now?"

"You are not polite to your wife, Horace, but I will tell you, if dat you promise to do what I shall ask," said Mrs. Horace, with a determined look. "I am not so sure you have de courage, Horace."

"Courage, Charlotte? What the devil do you mean, anyhow?" cried Becham, angrily.

"Soyez tranquille, mon cheri. De anger is not good. Listen, and I will tell the projet."

Mrs. Becham then informed her husband how she had discovered where miladi kept her bankbook—how she had looked over the bankbook and found out the amount to her credit.

"You don't mean to say the girl allowed you to look over her bankbook?" he asked, in wonder.

"Oh! no, but I have look it, my Horace. See. Here is ze book."

"Be George, you're a brick, Charlotte," he exclaimed, with admiration. "But what good is the book? You can't get her money with the book."

"Bah! how you are still de grand goose. Miladi she have \$35,000 in zat bank, Horace.

Thirty-five thousand! Long we would wait for dat much, mon cheri. Ze monthly monnaie would not for years—many, many—come to dat. Is there not some way to fool miladi—to force miladi, if we muss?"

A gleam of wicked intelligence came to the detective's eyes.

"Ah! you see, Horace?" she exclaimed.

"Be George, you're a wonder, Charlotte. I'm not clear all in a moment how, but there's a way. Yes, we'll find a way. But tell me your own idea. Perhaps you've thought it all out."

"Ha! ha! ha! it can be dat I have."

"Well, why don't you explain?" he cried, impatiently.

Mrs. Becham whispered her secret into the ears of her husband.

"Now what you tink?" she asked.

He reflected for awhile, and then shook his head with a look of vexation.

- "Don't you see that if we attempt this thing and succeed, detection would be sure to follow? Going away wouldn't save us. They'd be sure to hunt us down wherever we went," he said.
 - "Who will hunt us? who, Horace?"
 - "Why, the police."
 - "And who the police will tell?"
- "Fenton, or Sims, of course. Don't you see the scheme won't work that way?"
- "How fools zese men dey are!" exclaimed Mrs. Becham. "You a detective! Bah! you are ze baby detective. Listen me. No you zee zat ze genelmens cannot us expose? To expose us, dey expose deyselves? Bah! how fools you are!"

"By thunder, Charlotte, you have me there. I am an ass. Of course, you're right. The thing is clear. If we can only manage her—they would never dare bother us—then any more than now. Their interest would not permit. They would only be publishing to the world their own rascality and—"

"Bah! tartuffe, we are not de theater in. Let us work, not play," exclaimed the French woman, contemptuously silencing the man's affected explosion of just wrath over his employer's rascality.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Frenchwoman found reason every day now for calling upon miladi, as she chose to designate Clara Wallace or Sophie Sims. Miladi was sick, and the Frenchwoman was the self-appointed doctor, whose prescriptions were agreeable to the patient. At first the patient demurred to the medicine—a little elixir, composed of quinine and brandy. But objections ceased altogether after two doses. Then from the little invigorating, stimulating brandy, it was an easy glide to champagne, which the doctor declared was not only more comme il faut for miladi but vraiment bettair for ze maladie.

The Frenchwoman entertained miladi with praises of good Horace, who was, oh! so good—so generous. La moitié de son revenu was expended in relieving the suffering poor. Would miladi believe it?—there was a poor Irish laborer

who broke his leg by falling from a house, and Horace had supported the poor man and the poor wife for weeks. Was it not noble?

The patient thought it was and insisted upon contributing her little mite—five Canadian dollars.

Then there was that poor American seamstress, oh! si maigre—fort maigre, vraiment, dying slowly of consumption. Ah! it was so triste to see her—alone—toute seule—and obliged to work, work with her machine! What would you have? You could not know such distress and not weep. You must help—yes, even if you have so little yourself.

Mrs. Becham always had some new cases of distress at every visit, and never failed to receive liberal contributions from her unsuspecting patient. There was always, too, some touching example of the generous Horace's overflowing charity.

Sophie's confidence was completely won by the insinuating ways of the woman, and though always extremely reticent about her former life as actress and wife, dropped little hints occasionally about George Fenton's anxiety to have her remove from Montreal to New York. Mrs. Becham was alarmed at first by these intimations of the possibility that her intended victim might disappear some day through Fenton's entreaties and thus balk her game. Horace was even more alarmed than his wife, and proposed that the great coup should be struck at once. But Mrs. Becham, though equally anxious, was more prudent. Her victim was not yet quite to be depended upon. The grand coup might fail altogether by imprudent haste, and, as

Mrs. Becham observed, it was better to run one small risk than hazard all on an uncertainty.

One day, after assisting her patient to get rid of a bottle of champagne, Mrs. Becham related the story of a good woman with twins, for whom Horace had raised a very handsome purse. Sophie drew a check payable to Mrs. Becham herself for fifty dollars to be added to the purse.

"Ah! miladi, zat is too much. De one half would be enough. Oh! vraiement oui," exclaimed Mrs. Becham, handing back the check.

But Sophie would not be induced to lower the amount, and Mrs. Becham protested she would "no more tell ze cases. It would be like to rob miladi."

And when she went home she flourished the check in her husband's face, exclaiming:

"Horace, I will be rich mesel' soon. Look you how she give me for ze poor wife, wiss ze two twins! Fifty dollars, Horaco! fifty dollars!"

"Good pocket money, Charlotte. But look here, when are you going to make the final strike? We mustn't put it off too long. Fenton may turn up any day now to spoil our game completely," said Horace.

"Let it be to-morrow den, Horace—to-morrow. I t'ink we shall succeed, for nevair could there be a bettair opportunity. What you t'ink? I am to be miladi's maid to-morrow. I go even to-night. I muss leave my dear Horace for ze little while. Eh? You will be sad. You open your eyes, Horace, to ask what it mean. Ah! dis it mean: Ze domestique, Regnier, when I am with maladi get dispatch from Quebec; her sister be sick, dying.

Regnier she muss go dere. You hear, Horace? An' I have promise to be ze domestique and ze friend. Le Diable, it is, I t'ink, who help us, Horace. Ha! ha!"

His wife's "ha! ha!" was never agreeable to Horace; it always recalled a certain triumphant laugh of his Charlotte before they became man and wife. But now it was good music in his ears.

On questioning his wife further he learned that she had really obtained Sophie's consent to remain with her during the servant's enforced absence; that she had won the servant's confidence at last by a display of substantial sympathy in the shape of certain gold pieces to pay the expenses of the trip to Quebec, and by preparing the necessary telegraphic answer for Corinne Regnier.

"Glorious!" cried Horace when the whole scene had been described to him. "You are a wonder, Charlotte, yes, a perfect wonder, be George!"

In preparation for this grand coup—whatever it was to be—Horace and Charlotte had been putting their house in order. Valuable papers and articles had been packed up and shipped off somewhere. All the furniture that could be spared had been disposed of gradually, and everything was in readiness for a sudden departure forever from the scenes that had known Horace for so long. His money was strapped about his person in big American bills, and Charlotte herself was equally ready for the flight.

Truly, as Charlotte had said, the Devil was favoring the conspirators handsomely by brushing aside all obstacles.

Here was Regnier, the last and most difficult of

all, disposed of just in the nick of time. Mrs. Becham had tried often before to win over the affections of Regnier by frequent douceurs. Regnier pocketed the douceurs, for she dearly loved the coins, but she loved her mistress more, and she did not like the way things were going in the little home, since Mrs. Becham appeared. Wine, she knew, was not good for her mistress, and yet wine was what Mrs. Becham was urging her mistress to take every day. Her mistress was also growing more and more ill and melancholy every day. She read no more, and wept often. Regnier had promised Mr. Fenton to let him know surely if ever her mistress became ill, but she hesitated to do so for some time through disinclination to expose the true state of affairs. She hoped things would grow better; but as they did not, she wrote at last a few lines informing Mr. Fenton that her mistress was very ill and that he ought to come at once. It was on the morning of the very same day that the summons from Quebec reached her.

A poor old half-instructed woman like Corinne Regnier could not be expected to remember about her letter to Fenton, when the news of her sister's danger filled her mind. Had she remembered, perhaps she would have telegraphed to Fenton, or have waited until his arrival. But she thought of neither the one thing nor the other, and unfortunately her letter, not having wings, had to wait for the train, and Fenton had to wait for his train also. Yet it was during those waiting periods that the blow would fall, if it fell at all.

Fenton was filled with remorse when Corinne's alarming letter reached him, and started at once

for Montreal. Arrived there, he left his valise at the station, and proceeded at once to the house, though under ordinary circumstances he would not have deemed it proper to call at such an early hour.

The gentle pull he gave to the bell received no answer; so he rang again with a bolder jerk.

The echo of the bell continued for some seconds, he thought, with a sad moaning sound, that awoke vague alarm in his mind. He waited for a few moments, and then observed that the hall door was just the slightest bit ajar. A strange circumstance, truly. Without waiting longer, he went upstairs, and knocked at the door of Sophie's sitting-room, first gently and timidly, then loudly. All was still as death. No footfall succeeded his summons-no sound was heard save the rumbling of carts through the street. Only one course was left for him to pursue—to turn the handle of the door and ascertain whether it was locked. His hand trembled as the door yielded to his push, and the extraordinary presentiment of evil which he felt while ringing at the front door on the street became intense. What could the unlocked doors mean? Had there been a robbery? Either that, or Sophie must be very, very ill, indeed, and the servant had gone for the doctor, forgetting in her haste to fasten the doors.

"What if Sophie should be—? Oh! no, no—that could not be," he exclaimed shudderingly.

Then he called aloud and rapped excitedly with his cane against the door. But no voice answered. No one stirred.

The room was darkened owing to the heavily

curtained windows, but he groped his way across it, guided by a faint streak of light, kicking some object on the floor that obstructed his way. He pulled back the curtains, and the morning light poured in. He started on observing a table and some chairs overturned and scattered about the floor, just as if there had been a scuffle of some kind. He uttered a loud exclamation of horror when his eyes rested on the sofa lying along the wall, and there beheld the form of Sophie stretched motionless. With one bound he was at her side and raised her head in his arms.

"Sophie! Sophie! Speak to me!"

He felt her cold hands and face—listened with his ear to her breast to detect the faintest sign of respiration.

"Oh! my God, she is dead," he cried, sinking on his knees, and frantically endeavoring to coax back life by stroking her cold hands and shaking her gently by the shoulders.

"Oh! Sophie! Sophie! dear Sophie! speak! speak!

"My God, she has been murdered-strangled."

A dark mark about her throat had caused the last exclamation of horror. He tried to shriek for assistance, but his voice choked in the effort. He sprang to his feet and bounded toward the window to give an alarm. His foot struck against one of the overturned chairs and he stumbled, falling with great force and striking his head against the sharp corner of an inkstand on the floor. When his senses came back he was being jerked unceremoniously to his feet by the strong hands of two stal-

wart policemen. The blood was streaming from the wound on his temple.

"Rouse there—rouse up, my man," were the words that reached his ears from the coarse voice of one of the policemen.

The room was full of people, who were regarding him with unfriendly looks, but he thought nothing of this at first. He only thought of the body lying still and motionless on the sofa.

"Is she dead—really dead?" he asked of one of the policemen.

"Ay! that she be, sure enough," was the answer, in a very gruff tone.

"How is it possible?"

He made one effort to go toward the sofa, but was jerked back roughly, with the astonishing admonition:

"You be quiet there, will you?"

"What do you mean by such conduct?" he cried, indignantly, beginning to half realize the truth.

"See here, my man, I advise you again to keep quiet. It'll be best for you in the end," was the only satisfaction vouchsafed him.

"Great God! this is the most damnable stupidity. Do you mean to say that you think—oh! this is atrocious. Take off your hands, men. You are committing the grossest outrage on a gentleman. Do you know who I am?"

He struggled to free himself from the tight grasp of the policemen, but only caused them to hold him more roughly and securely. The blood swelled in his veins, and his face became red with rage and indignation. His excited manner and loud demonstrations drew everybody's attention away from the body, when the chief of police arrived on the scene with the coroner and a physician. Fenton immediately addressed his protests to the chief, a grave and self-possessed man, who listened patiently to the complaints.

"If you, sir, will hear my explanation for a moment, you will see what an unjustifiable outrage on the person of an innocent man your subordinates have committed. I arrived in Montreal only this morning—less than two hours ago—in consequence of a letter telling me that Mrs.—that the unfortunate body—that she who lies there murdered by some dastardly ruffian, was very ill. When I reached the house I found the door of this room unlocked, and when I entered I saw with horror and grief the result of the frightful crime that had been committed. I know no more about it than you do, sir. I suppose I am the one man in all the world who feels the deepest anguish and horror."

"Who are you, sir? What is your name?" asked the chief.

- "George Fenton of New York."
- "The Wall Street man?"
- "Yes. I am well known in the financial world. Any one of your bankers here will tell you about my character and standing."

The chief looked inquiringly at the two policemen, one of whom spoke up.

"We found him, major, lying face downward on the floor, when we arrived here. He was bleeding as you see him now, and we supposed he had been injured in a struggle with the woman. What was a gentleman doing here at such an hour in the morning?"

"I have explained how I came here and what I was doing. Was it not the most natural thing in the world I should come here at once, knowing that the lady was sick? Go to the depot and you will find my valise there. The men on the train will tell you I speak the truth. The old servant, who wrote to me, will tell you I was the best friend of the murdered lady. Call her—find her, and let her speak."

"There is no such person here, major. There was no one in the house when we came but the prisoner and the murdered woman," said the police officer.

"Perhaps something dreadful has happened to her, too," cried Fenton. "The officer is right. She was not here when I reached the house—at least in this room."

"Have you examined all the other rooms?" asked the chief.

"Yes, major, there was no one in any of them," answered the officer addressed.

"How did you receive that wound on your head, Mr. Fenton?" demanded the chief.

"Simply enough. I stumbled and fell to the floor, striking some sharp object," replied Fenton.

The chief's eyes searched the floor, and observed the large glass inkstand spotted with blood.

"Surely you must believe me?" cried Fenton, growing excited again. "If you still have any doubt, one of your own officers can remove it. Send for Officer Becham. He knows me."

"Do you mean Horace Becham?" demanded

the chief, suddenly fixing his eyes keenly on Fenton.

"Yes, Horace Becham; that's his name. He can explain."

The chief shook his head and looked disappointed. Fenton's manner had impressed him as that of an innocent man until the mention of Becham's name. One of his subordinates, who had been examining the room, called him aside at this juncture and whispered to him, at the same time handing him some article he had found in a closet. The chief and his assistant examined this article closely, and then continued to confer together in a low voice for a few moments.

When the chief returned to Fenton, his face wore a graver and severer expression.

"You say you came here this morning, and on that point we can easily satisfy ourselves. You refer to ex-Officer Becham, too. Very well, we will have no difficulty there either. Now, let me ask you a few questions myself. How is it that you, a great New York broker, whose name and reputation, I admit, are well and favorably known here, came to be in relations with a poor woman such as this murdered woman seems to be?"

Fenton felt the indignation boiling up in him again, for he could not fail to understand the drift of the chief's question. But he strove to give a calm answer.

"I cannot explain that fully here before all these people, but I shall be ready to do so privately to your own satisfaction. At the same time, understand that my hesitation is not caused by anything

compromising, but only through consideration for the feelings and interests of others."

- "You came here armed, did you not?" demanded the chief. "Why was that?"
- "I did not come armed. I never carry arms. Why do you ask such a question? You can search me and satisfy yourself."
- "You declare you did not come armed—that you had no pistol on your person?" inquired the chief, astonished at Fenton's positive denial and apparent sincerity.
- "Most assuredly. I repeat I did not come armed I had no pistol I never carry such weapons."
- "And yet this was found on the floor just now," said the chief, drawing from his pocket a beautiful silver-mounted revolver.

Fenton started at the familiar appearance of the weapon. It certainly resembled one of a pair he had in New York.

The chief noticed the surprised look of Fenton. His assistants exchanged significant looks. Everybody listened and waited in breathless expectation for the next question of the chief. Even the coroner and physician looked up from their examination of the corpse. Fenton himself was awed, and a bewildering doubt arose in his mind. What if it should be one of his pistols? But no, that could not be possible. They were both in his Wall Street office.

"You say you are Mr. George Fenton of New York. This revolver contains the initials 'G. F.,'" said the detective slowly and solemnly.

"Great God! how can that be? Am I dreaming? am I mad?" cried Fenton.

"Mr. Fenton, I'm afraid we shall have to detain you on suspicion," said the chief, turning away, and looking at the coroner, who nodded his approval.

The two policemen, who had released their hold on Fenton during the colloquy with the chief, now resumed it, each grasping one of Fenton's arms. He resisted no longer, and remained quiet until he overheard a remark made by the doctor.

"The woman seems to have been strangled some time. I should imagine she has been dead for at least twenty-four hours, if not longer."

"You hear, Mr. Chief? You hear what the doctor says? If she has been dead so long, how can I have had anything to do with the deed? I only arrived on the morning train. You can satisfy yourself on that point at once."

But the effect of his appeal was a wave of the chief's hand to his assistants.

"What! You will not exhaust such a simple means before you sanction this abominable outrage! This is your British justice, is it? An innocent man is to be marched through your streets to prison like a desperate criminal because you will not take the trouble to find proof of his innocence that lies under your very nose."

Fenton's wrath was again beyond control.

"Conduct Mr. Fenton to my office," said the chief. "Take him in a carriage."

George descended the stairs between two policemen and was driven off.

"Have Horace Becham and the woman servant

before the coroner," said the chief to one of his assistants; "and summon the railway people."

As he left the house he said to himself—

"This is a singular case. The prisoner acts and talks like an innocent man. But why did he lie about the pistol?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

DURING the period of which I write any great tragedy in any part of the world was good food for the daily newspapers of New York, and as a matter of course columns of exciting descriptions were surrendered to "the horrible murder in Montreal." The announcement of George Fenton's arrest on suspicion fell like an awful thunder clap on the good people of New York. Appearing first in the afternoon papers it was accompanied by the usual misstatements and exaggerations inseparable from the hasty gathering up of details by enterprising reporters, and the consequent shock to readers who knew or had heard of Fenton may be imagined when it is stated that one of the accounts included the "attempted suicide of the assassin." The only basis for this outrageous statement was the alleged fact that one of the cartridges in the revolver was found to have been discharged and Fenton's head was wounded. The police officer who gave the information to the reporter had overlooked the important fact that the damage to Fenton's head was not such as would have resulted from a bullet. But readers do not stop to make critical examinations of evidence in such cases when served up in evening papers.

Mr. Remsford almost dropped in the street when his eyes encountered the shocking head lines. "George Suspected of Murder!" "George Attempting to Take his Own Life!" "What fearful news! What an announcement to make to Ada! Poor Ada! poor Ada! It will kill herkill her!"

He hurried home in the desperate hope to get there before the dread news itself. He rushed into his wife's room and locked the door.

"Awful—awful news, my wife—awful. We must keep it from Ada. Don't let her out. Don't let her see the papers. Where is she?" he exclaimed.

"What is it? What can you mean, Adlai?" asked Mrs. Remsford in extreme alarm at her husband's excited manner.

He waved the newspaper in his hand and cried, "George! George!"

"George!" echoed his wife. "Is he dead?"

"Look, look at this horrible thing."

She took the paper and glanced at the head lines quickly. A cry of agony, which resounded through the house, burst from her lips, and she fell to the floor unconscious. In another moment Ada was clamoring at the door for admission. So were the servants. The agonized father crushed the newspaper into his coat pocket and opened the door.

"It is nothing—only a fainting spell, Ada—only a fainting spell, my darling. She will come to in a moment. See, she is breathing. She is

recovering now. Fetch some smelling salts. Run after them yourself, darling. Run, you had better go yourself," said Mr. Remsford.

The servants ran off in search of the salts, but Ada remained stroking her mother's hands and fanning her face. She was pale, but extraordinarily calm.

"Father, what does it mean? Mother never faints. Has anything happened? Why was the door locked? Why did mother scream in that awful manner?" asked Ada.

The agitated father averted his face before his daughter's searching eyes. He tried to frame some evasive answer, but before he could do so, Mrs. Remsford revived, opened her eyes and saw Ada bending over her.

"Ah! my child! my poor child! God pity you," she exclaimed with such intense agony in voice and face, that Ada felt her heart almost stand still.

"Oh! mother, dear mother, what is the matter? Why do you look at me so-so-sadly?"

The tears flowed down her young cheeks, while father and servants raised Mrs. Remsford and placed her on a lounge. Then she appealed to her father again:

"There is some dreadful trouble, father. I see it, I feel it. I know. Tell me what it is. I will be calm and brave. See, I am not afraid. What

is the use of trying to deceive me?"

"I cannot, my child-I cannot," he replied.

"Then you will, darling mother, you will, I know."

"I think it is better to speak, Adlai," said the pale wife, catching her daughter's hand, and holding it with all her strength. "Sit down by me here, Ada, and father will explain."

She obeyed, and then looked wistfully to her father.

"The fact is, darling, something distressing has happened—" he began unsteadily.

"Something to George?" interrupted Ada.

"Is he ill? Where is he?"

She tried to rise, but Mrs. Remsford detained her.

"Darling, it is worse than that-"

"Not dead, surely," exclaimed Ada, feebly.

"No, no, not that. The fact is, dear, he is under arrest in Canada. Something has happened there—something dreadful, and he is suspected—"

Ada's face brightened up, and she spoke calmly.

"Suspected of what? Tell me. Don't hesitate. I can bear anything now that I know he is not dead or ill. I will never believe anything wrong of George-never-never."

"That's right, darling. Nor will we. It can only be some huge mistake that connects our

George's name with a murder."

"Murder! murder!" she repeated with a shudder. "Oh! that is monstrous - incredible - impossible!"

Her face was flushed now instead of pale. Father and mother both breathed a sigh of relief. Ada was stronger, braver than either of them. Mrs. Remsford drew her daughter's face to her own and kissed it again and again with unspeakable tenderness.

"My own brave darling. God be thanked for your firmness and courage, You are right, dear. It is absolutely impossible."

"Of that I am as sure as that I live," said Ada resolutely. "We must go to him, mother. We must not leave him to himself a moment longer than we can help. You will take me to him, of course, at once, father."

Meanwhile, during all the excitement that was agitating the city of New York, one of the big English steamers from Liverpool was making its way majestically through the waters of the harbor, and in due time was lashed to its pier on the North River. Among the first passengers to land were Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Sims, young Master Geoffrey Fisher Sims, and four servants. They came unheralded, and were thus able to reach one of the carriages waiting on the pier, undisturbed by interviewers or by the hosts of friends, flatterers and sycophants that would have been on the lookout for such distinguished personages, had their arrival been anticipated. The sea voyage had greatly benefited Geoffrey physically. His eyes looked clear and bright, his complexion was healthy, and some of the old springiness and strength appeared in his active movements.

The carriage rolled along Broadway and Fifth avenue until the well-known mansion was reached. As Geoffrey alighted, a screaming newsboy shoved before his face a copy of one of the extras.

"Ah! bother!" exclaimed Geoffrey.

But the newsboy persevered, shouting, "Full account of the awful Canadian murder."

To rid himself of the boy's importunity he took the paper and gave the boy an English half-crown piece.

"There, go on-never mind the change," said

Geoffrey, running up the stoop after his wife and heir.

"Jiminy! A big silver piece! That's a regular stunner," cried the delighted boy, running off and resuming his "Here's your extry—here's your extry—get full account of the," etc., etc.

The returned millionaire did not even look at the paper. When he got inside he threw it carelessly down. He was not in the habit of buying "extras" or of reading them either. This one lay for some time on a little card table in the hall. with its outside, crowned with startling headlines, looking up to the ceiling. They seemed to challenge notice—begging to be read. But they lay there, awful little black things on their white beds, unobserved. Master Sims rattled through the hall in all the joyous recklessness of the small boy bent on such explorations as the small boy of thirteen or fourteen months, whose skirt is held by an appreciative nurse, is capable of at that unsteady age. The appreciative nurse was our old friend Sally Smith, who displayed her genius now by pulling a cane from the hall stand and inviting her young charge to play horseman. Nothing loath to oblige Sally, Master Sims permitted himself to be mounted on the bare-backed steed, and toddled back and forth in the hall until rider and horse collided with the card table. Result: - one leg of card table dislocated - cards scattered right and left-and young Master Sims screaming with delight, and Sally disconsolate. Sally cried:

"Whoa! horsey! whoa!"

The steed was pulled up with a sudden jerk,

and its rider thrown. But no bones broken, no bruises sustained.

The eyes of the child encountered the headline letters of the extra, which still looked up to the ceiling. Master Sims clutched the paper and held it before his eyes upside down, just as his mother glided downstairs. She stooped, picked up the child, and pressed him lovingly to her breast as she tripped into the library. He still held the newspaper in one little hand. The thumb of the other hand was thrust into his mouth; that particular thumb being his sugar-plum. That's what Sally Smith called it, because her young master loved so much to suck it.

When Mrs. Sims squatted down on the floor to have a good play with Geffy, he declined. He preferred to resume his investigations of the headlines. He spread the paper before him on the carpet, and dabbed his fat little wet thumb over the black letters.

"My heyes, vot a hintfant!" cried Sally.

Mrs. Sims seemed struck also with the evidence of her son's intellectual precociousness, and contemplated him with eyes of rapture.

"Hallo! hallo!" cried Geoffrey, appearing suddenly among them. "Am I permitted to squat, too, Master Geffy?"

Kate pulled him down beside her, and the awful headlines at last stared him in the face.

"Mur — George Fenton — Clara! Oh, God! Suicide! Kate! Kate!"

Does it not seem as if all these terrible strokes of fate were arranged to fall upon us not only

when least expected, but during the most blissful moments of our life? When we have thrown care to the dogs, and forgotten all but present joys, is it not then that some misfortune, sudden and terrible, overwhelms us like the avalanche that sweeps down upon the happy homes and peaceful dwellers nestling in the valleys below? From the bright clear sky speeds the awful bolt; from the treacherous calm the wild hurricane.

Geoffrey might not have bought that extra from the brawling newsboy, or he might have thrust it into his coat pocket and forgotten all about it. Then, at least, the few fleeting moments of happiness with wife and child, squatted on the carpeted floor, would have rolled by without hitch or flaw. But fate had ordained that he should throw it on the card table, to be cast thence on the floor, to be clutched by his little boy, to be pressed to his wife's bosom—warmed, as it were, into new life—and then to be stung by it to the very heart's core, in the moment of calmest content.

How ruthlessly the pretty little domestic picture was torn to fragments in one instant by Geoffrey's horrified cry! Even the innocent babe, incapable of understanding what the cry meant, hid his face quickly in the mother's lap, and bawled out all the accents of infantile terror. She, the wife, was paralyzed, for a moment, watching without a stir her husband's intense agitation as he read line after line, word after word, of the ghastly story. She could neither cry nor speak until he had finished all and clutched his hair violently, like one about to go mad.

"Geoffrey! Oh, Geoffrey!"

"Kate, Kate, did you read—did you understand?" almost in a whisper.

"Yes, darling; I understand George is charged with the crime of murder," she answered with a forced calmness.

"Of murder! Yes, of murdering her—her, Kate?"

"Who is she, Geoffrey? Who is Clara Wallace, dear?"

"Clara Wallace! Clara! Ha! ha! She was my wife—my first wife! Do you understand? Clara was Sophie, Belle, Vernon, Sanders. And he accused of her murder! He, George Fenton, who loved her with his whole soul."

"Oh! Geoffrey! Why do you say such wild things, my husband? Did she not die two years ago? Your mind is upset, darling. Come, let us go upstairs. You must lie down."

Sally Smith picked up the infant and withdrew at once, her own tears flowing sympathetically.

"No, my mind is not upset, Kate. Let us stay here. I can tell all now where we are better. I am not wandering. This is not a disorder of my mind. Would to God it only were."

Kate hung her head. Despair was at her heart.

"Don't, don't, Kate, mistake me. I know what you are thinking—that I have deceived—wronged you. No, I have not. I thought her dead until a year ago."

Kate looked up again gratefully, and took her husband's trembling hand.

"You remember when we went suddenly to California and Europe — when you noticed how

changed I had become, Kate. That was the time I learned she still lived—that she had escaped the awful death we all thought she had met—that she lived in Canada, hiding her identity, and her—her disfigurement, under her own maiden name, which I never knew till that time. How could I tell you the truth then, dearest? How could I blast your happiness forever? You won't, you can't blame me for that surely?"

"No, no, no, dearest. It was your love for me—your deep, unselfish love. But oh! you should have let me share the pain with you, darling. Indeed, you should have done that," she answered, tenderly.

"How could I? Even had I not feared that your beautiful Christian faith would have forced you to leave me, I could not end your happy life so rudely, so shamefully as that."

"Nothing could ever have forced me from you—not even that," exclaimed Kate, resolutely. "And now, darling, look at me, and learn that I love you more—unspeakably more than ever. I adore you, darling. Oh! Geoffrey, come to my heart, my love, my love!"

Her arms wound themselves about his neck, and she kissed him with all the fervor of a warm, pure love.

"I might have known this, darling wife. I should not have doubted a moment. But it was better, far better, I should suffer alone. What good would it have been to plunge you and mother and all of us into sorrow and shame? We resolved—George and I—to keep the secret to ourselves."

"Good, generous George!" cried Kate.

"Yes, good and generous, and now he, too, is suffering for my sake."

"How can you say that, dear? This account must be some dreadful mistake. George is no more guilty than you are—than I am."

"I believe that firmly, dearest. But yet he is suffering through me, and it tears my heart to think of it, Kate. I must go to him at once."

"Yes, dear, it is your duty. Stand by him and save him, Geff. Go, in God's name, and do your duty."

"What a brave, good wife you are, darling. I feel already as if we, you and I, had saved George."

"You shall be the means of saving him," said Kate with spirit. "Oh! Geoffrey, I am happy now, even with this dreadful business of George's, for I believe our last cloud has rolled by, and that from now on our life will be all brightness. God prosper you, darling husband, and—bring back George with you."

Geoffrey Sims' afternoon that day was a busy one indeed, consulting Cramson, the greatest criminal lawyer at the New York bar in those days, sending to and receiving dispatches from Fenton, and filling up now and then, when alone with his wife, the gaps in the story about the late life of Clara Wallace and George Fenton.

Mr. Henry M. Cramson accompanied him to Montreal, retained to defend George Fenton should the infamous charge of murder be seriously pressed.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE coroner's inquest began next morning, and up to a certain point was conducted with a rushing method, which in Fenton's opinion was only another instance of the same kind of indecent haste displayed the day before. Certain policemen and railroad employés had given their testimony, and the doctor was learnedly explaining his post mortem examination of the body, when Major Goss, the chief of police, entered and sat down by the coroner's side. The major and the coroner conferred in low tones until the doctor's evidence was concluded, and thereafter whispered together for some time. It was evident something had happened, else why this pause in the proceedings? Fenton nervously scanned the faces of the two officials, and, as he caught the major's eye for a second, imagined he detected just the faintest sign of relaxed severity.

"Call Horace Becham," said the coroner.

"Horace Becham will take the stand."

There was no response. Horace Becham did not appear. The major nodded significantly to the coroner.

"Call Corinne Regnier," commanded the coroner next, with the same result as in the case of Becham. Corinne Regnier neither answered nor appeared.

"This investigation will stand adjourned for one week from to-day. Gentlemen of the jury, you

will please be here promptly at ten o'clock on that day—one week from to-day."

The jurymen gladly withdrew, the spectators, collected in the hope of sensational developments, left one by one, and soon only the coroner, Major Goss, and the police guard remained in the room with the prisoner. Still the coroner and the major continued their conference in a low tone, only a few words of which reached Fenton's ears, but they were words that stirred him deeply.

"I will be responsible for his appearance."

Major Goss, it was, who uttered them, with a quick glance toward Fenton himself.

When the conference was over Major Goss shook the coroner's hand warmly, and then approached where Fenton sat between the policemen. At a signal from the chief the officers withdrew some distance, and Major Goss sat down by Fenton.

"Mr. Fenton, I have had a long conference with the coroner about your unfortunate relation to this crime. The doctor's testimony to the effect that the deceased was probably dead for some hours before you could have arrived—the verification of your own statements by the railroad employés, and—something else, which I cannot now explain, render it at least probable that some one else committed the deed. The doctor may err, of course, in his scientific opinion, and Miss Wallace may not have been dead as long as he supposes, when the discovery of her corpse was made. But the coroner and I at present think you are entitled to the benefit of the doubt on that point. The strongest point against you is your denial about the pistol.

Will you tell me frankly why you did not own up to that?"

"I can only repeat that it was because I did not have any pistol about me. I never brought it to Montreal—that or any other pistol. If it is mine, I cannot explain how it found its way to Montreal. I only know it was not through me."

Major Goss watched Fenton's face narrowly during this answer, and then pulled the pistol

from his pocket, saying:

"Do you object to telling me whether or not it is yours. It contains four unexploded cartridges; the other was discharged. Look at the weapon."

"Why should I object to telling the truth? This revolver is mine. The initials are mine," answered Fenton promptly. "God only knows how it came to be where your assistant swears he found it."

Major Goss placed the weapon in his pocket again.

"Mr. Fenton, my duty compels me to detain you until the investigation is concluded, but—not under arrest. I will only ask you for your parole of honor. Do you promise me as a gentleman not to leave here—to appear whenever required—to make no attempt to quit Montreal without notifying me?"

"Not only will I give you that pledge, which I do now unreservedly, but I promise I will aid you, by every means in my power, to solve this fearful mystery. My whole fortune and that of some of my friends will be placed at your disposal, if necessary," answered Fenton.

The Item group of idlers still hanging about the sidewalk in front of the house were astounded shortly after when they saw Major Goss and Mr. George Fenton, "the Yankee broker," make their appearance, arm in arm, like the best of friends, enter a carriage, and drive off together.

"A new clew." "The Yankee is not the assassin." "I knew a gentleman like that couldn't have done it." "Didn't I say so?" "Wonder who it was then?" were the expressions heard among the group when the carriage disappeared.

"I say, what's up?" asked one of the idlers of the first policeman who emerged from the house.

- "Blest if I know. Maybe they've found that the old servant woman, who's made herself scarce, is the real party. Looks queer anyhow," was the policeman's explanation to his friend, the idler. It was given privately to this friend, but the "tip" was too precious to be preserved in one bosom, and before many hours the news was not only all over the town, but spread before the New York public in extras.
 - "Fenton Released."
 - "No Ground for Suspicion against Him."
- "A Woman Now Said to Have Committed the Deed."
 - "Sketch of the Life of the Supposed Assassin."
 These were some of the headlines with which

the new clew was preceded.

The next day Geoffrey Sims, Mr. Cramson and the Remsfords arrived in Montreal. Fenton expected the lawyer and Geoffrey, but Mr. Remsford's appearance, accompanied by Ada, was a great surprise. George was deeply touched at

this unexpected proof of the young lady's confidence and devotion.

"This is very, very good of you, Ada," he said, holding the palpitating young lady in his arms.

"Could you imagine we would leave you to yourself under the circumstances, George?" asked Mr. Remsford. "Heaven be praised that we find you released so soon. I tell you, my boy, we all had a pretty hard turn."

Ada had no words to utter. She could only weep, while George tried to soothe her.

"Don't mind her tears, my boy. It is the first good cry she has had since this awful business began. But it will do her good. I tell you, George, she was plucky. I never saw anything like it. I keeled right over—so did her mother—when we read the extra, but Ada kept her head and her tears, and ordered me to bring her here at once. She did not believe a word of it—no indeed."

"I hope you did not either, Mr. Remsford," remarked Fenton.

"Not I," hurriedly explained the old gentleman. "But I lost my head completely, while she was as clear and—and—well as right and clever as she always is."

"My dear Ada!" murmured George, tenderly. His lips touched the little ear into which he breathed the words. It was a kiss such as a father might have given, but it thrilled the young girl as if it had been the most impassioned of a lover's.

But let us leave this little group, passing over all the tender confidences exchanged between the affianced pair when left to themselves by Mr. Remsford—passing over also the interview that took place between George and Geoffrey—and follow Mr. Cramson to the office of Major Goss, the chief of police. The great lawyer found the major looking over certain letters that had been found among the murdered lady's effects. Three check books lay on the table before him.

"On behalf of my client I come to offer you my assistance in clearing up this mystery," said Mr. Cramson, when he had taken the seat offered him, facing the chief. "Between us I hope we will be able to get at the truth."

Major Goss thanked the lawyer, and, like the shrewd, practical man that he was, lost little time in compliments which he knew would be wasted on a lawyer of Mr. Cramson's character and wide experience. After fully explaining what had taken place before the coroner, he told the lawyer that he was almost convinced that his client knew nothing about the murder. The finding of the pistol, he said, was the only circumstance that looked queer, but as the pistol had evidently played no part in the tragedy — the victim having been strangled to death - it could have no bearing except as a clew—unless it could be supposed that Fenton had brought the pistol with the intention of using it, if necessary, and had dropped it in the excitement of a scuffle. But there was no assignable motive in Fenton's case. On the contrary the letters he had read disclosed the fact that Fenton had been a true friend to the deceased lady.

"I don't know whether you are cognizant of the strange story these letters disclose, Mr. Cramson," observed the chief. "It is by all odds the strangest that has ever come within my own experience."

"You may take it for granted that I know the whole story," said the lawyer; "but I hope it will not be necessary, for the ends of justice, to drag that story into the investigation."

"It is too soon to decide that point yet. Of course we will have to be guided by circumstances on that point as on others that may come up. There will be no reluctance on my part to withhold all that may be withheld consistent with my duty," answered Major Goss, cautiously.

"I am sure of that," said the lawyer.

"Three people have disappeared, who may have had something to do with the murder, or be able to throw some light on it. It is strange that that old servant, whose reputation is very good, by the way, has disappeared so suddenly. It is strange, too, that neither Becham nor his wife or mistress—whichever she is—can be found. Becham's reputation was always fairly good, though I never really liked the fellow — and there is nothing absolutely positive against him as yet. But, Mr. Cramson, if you will look over the stubs in this check-book, you will find that both he and his wife have at different times received sums of money from the murdered lady. You will observe, too, that the very last evidence of a check drawn by Mrs.-Mrs.-"

"Sims," said Cramson. "There is no harm using that name among ourselves."

"You will observe then on Mrs. Sims' last check book that the last stub shows a figure—not in her own handwriting—for a suspiciously large sum of money. Thirty-four thousand dollars!" continued the chief.

"Has that check been cashed at the bank?" asked the lawyer.

" No."

"In whose favor does the stub show the check to have been drawn?" next asked the lawyer.

"That little fact is omitted on the stub."

"That is certainly remarkable. Perhaps the lady only wrote a check and destroyed it, forgetting to cancel the stub also. Ladies, you know, are not brilliant at business. It may be that, or it may be also that the person in whose favor the check was drawn was the murderer and feared to offer it at the bank after the crime," said the lawyer thoughtfully.

"That is precisely my theory—I mean your last suggestion," observed Major Goss, charmed that the great lawyer's quick perceptions agreed with

his own analysis of the case.

"The important step that remains, then," resumed the lawyer, "is to identify the hand-writing on that stub. That found, we have the clew."

Again Major Goss was filled with admiration and pardonable pride. Mr. Cramson studied his face for a moment, and then said:

- "I think, Major Goss, you have already done it."
- "I think I have, sir; I may almost say I am sure," replied the major, with a triumphant sparkle in his eye.
- "What fools even the shrewdest of these criminals are!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Think of that

man leaving such unnecessary evidence behind him. If, as I suppose you mean, it was the murderer who filled up the check—only leaving the signature to be written by Mrs. Sims, what a downright idiot he was to put even a scratch on the stub."

Mr. Cramson regarded the stub critically for a moment, and then breathed with relief.

"Thank God! I don't know the writing," he said. "Whose do you suppose it to be?"

"It is disguised, of course, but there are some of the characteristic signs remaining, nevertheless, to make one believe that this and that were written by the same hand," was the major's reply, as he pointed with one hand to the fatal stub, and held in the other a bit of writing on a sheet of official paper. "Will you tell me what you think, Mr. Cramson?"

"I am not an expert, of course, major, but there are some surprising resemblances, I must say, in the two," was the reply. The lawyer continued to examine the two specimens for some time after thus speaking.

"And now I repeat my question. Who wrote the stub?" demanded the lawyer at last.

"Horace Becham!" replied Major Goss.

Mr. Cramson gave a long whistle, looked up at the ceiling, drummed on the arms of his chair with his fingers, and then exclaimed:

"By Jove! major, you have solved the mystery."

Rising from his chair he seized the hand of Major Goss and wrung it fervently.

"I congratulate you, sir, and I thank you. It is an immense relief."

CHAPTER XXXI.

The coroner's jury met on the date fixed, but nothing was done. They were told to come back at the end of another week, and then once more the time was extended seven days. The postponements, while exasperating to George Fenton, who was still living under a sort of cloud which he considered would only be completely dispelled by the jury's verdict of vindication, were nevertheless unavoidable owing to the fact that neither Becham nor his wife nor Corinne Regnier could be found. The detective skill of Canada was completely baffled.

It was under these circumstances that Mr. Cramson himself resolved to try what could be done by the New York detective force. Phil Armstrong was at that time supposed to be the cleverest of them all. He had been trained under old Matsell, and had distinguished himself by circumventing some very noted criminals. It is true that some people did say that Phil was no better than he should be, and that his skill was not skill at allonly pure luck; in fact, that he had blundered on certain discoveries on which his reputation rested, and that other men on the force, of whom much less was heard in the newspapers, deserved far more credit than Phil himself. But then there are always envious rivals, you know; and Phil appeared not to worry over the hard things that were sometimes said of him. "A feller can't please everybody," Phil used to say. "T'aint no use of trying.

The swell fellers—them chaps in Wall Street and the clubs—knows me and trusts me."

And it was quite true, this boast of Phil Armstrong about "the swell fellers." Let any one of them lose a watch or a pocket-book and tell Phil about it, Phil never failed to recover the article and restore it to the grateful owner for a consideration. Some moral people thought the practice quite reprehensible, nevertheless, and hinted that a policeman who let himself out for such purposes was a trafficker in crime, and got his share of the booty from the thieves themselves. Indeed, they went so far as to intimate that Phil even contrived some of the pocket-picking and light robberies expressly to enable him to recover and be rewarded. Still, if these stories were true, was it not strange that the detective could still hold the confidence of his official superiors?

When Mr. Cramson told Phil Armstrong what he was expected to do—what new laurels awaited him with rich reward, he promised to "work like a beaver." That was his exact expression, and he began beavering in Canada, going all over the old ground that had been trodden before by provincial experts. The sum of his achievements when he returned to New York was an old daguerreotype of Becham in his youth, and a "theory." Phil had learned that word thoroughly and made it almost his own exclusive property. Whenever he was given a case to work up, "my theory" always found its way into the newspapers. Everything either squared with or did not square with "my theory."

In the Becham case "my theory" amounted to

this: Horace Becham had been a detective himself. No detective, turned criminal, would leave behind him ordinary clews. Becham had excelled himself. He had left no clews whatever. But the stub business? Pshaw! that was of no consequence now. It was unnecessary for "my theory." How was a stub going to help to find Becham? "No, my theory is that Becham has not run away to Europe with his French wife, as another feller not a detective would have done, but that he is on this side of the big pond, perhaps in the Provinces, if not in the States. But, as he was a detective, he is more likely to be where he knows he could hide best, right here in New York. He may have pretended to go to Europe, just to throw the Kanuck greenhorns off the right track, but ten dollars to a dime he is right here."

And to prove the sagacity of "my theory" he paraded the old daguerreotype at the steamship offices until he found a clerk who pointed to "Horace Becham and wife" among the names on the passenger list of a steamer that had sailed from Boston via Halifax some time before. The gentleman certainly did resemble the old daguerreotype, the clerk admitted, asking however of what consequence that fact could be if Mr. Horace Becham was the Becham sought after. The detective only grinned superciliously and asked whether it were not true that Becham had got off at Halifax instead of going all the way to Europe. Then the detective grinned again when the clerk acknowledged that Becham had got off at Halifax.

[&]quot;Now Becham came right back to Boston from

Halifax, and from Boston he came here to New York. Here he is, and here he'll stick until we nab him. That's my theory," said Phil to Mr. Cramson, in making his report.

"Very well, now your real work begins," answered Mr. Cramson. "Nab the fellow, and nab him as quickly as you can. Remember, it's worth ten thousand, perhaps more, in your pocket."

The bait was tempting, but Phil Armstrong failed to grab it. When it came to the nabbing of Becham his resources were exhausted. All his efforts had the same ending. This, let it be well understood, was in the days when New York's police organization had not reached the perfection, which, in the opinion of its admirers, it has attained to-day. There was no Byrnes then as now to unravel the mysteries of crime and to confound the criminals.

So Mr. Cramson at last told Armstrong in quite legal and parliamentary language that he was a humbug and a fraud. This is how he said it:

"Armstrong, if ever my pockets are picked, I will send for you. But for the present let us say good-by."

He tried other detectives, but with equally unsatisfactory results, and then went back to Montreal to consult with Major Goss. What was to be done? Should the inquest go on without waiting for Becham's capture, or what?

Fenton himself was anxious to have the suspense ended, and urged that the coroner's investigation should be resumed at once and continued to a close without interruption. The long waiting and suspense were insupportable.

"I have nothing to fear from any honest jury. Let us have a verdict, and be done with the thing. The criminal can be hunted down afterward," said George Fenton.

But this did not suit Major Goss for some reason; so the conference ended with an agreement to postpone for another week. Geoffrey Sims remained with Fenton a good part of the dreary week that followed, and then, as he had not seen his wife and child for more than a month, he told his friend he believed he'd take a run back to New York for a few days, but return in time for the inquest.

"Oh! go by all means, Geff. You know it's no use staying in this weary way. You need not hurry either about returning. Things are all right, though infernally slow. The inquest is only a form. I shan be exonerated or vindicated, and then I can give my own time to hunting down the murderer myself," said Fenton.

"It's an odd thing, George," remarked Geoffrey, but talking of your vindication, reminds me of my dreams lately. For three nights in succession I have had the same dream, always the same. It was about a Frenchweman—not this Becham woman, but another quite of the same kind, I fancy, who each time in my dreams has urged me to go to New York. And the queerest part of it was that the reason given for her urging was, "You shall hear something strange in New York."

"Very likely you will," said Fenton, with one of his rare smiles; "New York is the place for that sort of thing. You have two good reasons instead of one now for going."

"Good-by, then, George."

"Good-by, Geff. Don't forget to write to me about the dream developments, if you find any."

It was said jocosely, and each smiled pleasantly at parting, but Geoffrey's dreams had made too strong an impression on his mind to be dismissed lightly, for they had revived the recollection of the disagreeable Mme. Vernay, associated with the most painful incident in his father's career—the only blot on his memory. Sincerely did Geoffrey hope that his dreams did not portend a meeting with Mme. Vernay. Need it be said that Mme. Vernay was the Frenchwoman of his dreams.

The rain was falling in torrents when he reached New York, but the young millionaire thought little about the dismal, dreary aspect out-of-doors, or of his muddy boots and dripping coat and hat, when once more in the presence of his wife and heir. The shrieking wind and the angry rain, sweeping in gusts against the window panes on that mid-October morning, raw and cold, as a wet October morning generally is in New York, might do their worst. They could not spoil his pleasure now, though he had regarded them as a special vexation at the depot because they prevented his walking from there to his home. When he had discarded his wet for clean, fresh, dry garments and sat down in the cheery breakfast room, warmed by a bright coal fire in the iron grate, with his wife right opposite, he thought it quite delicious to have the horrid storm.

He and Kate sat smiling at each other in perfect content.

"Oh! I feel so happy at this moment, Geff!

to have you all to myself again!" murmured Mrs. Sims, pressing her husband's hand lovingly.

"Yes, darling, but unfortunately it's only for a day or so. I must get back to poor George, you know. I declare one learns to value more highly a dear little wife—like somebody—through an occasional separation. It seems to me you have become ten times more precious and beautiful—and loving—and—"

"And what, darling?" asked the delighted wife, squeezing his hand again.

"And—as I was going to say when you pinched me so horribly—the thought of having to leave you again—"

"So soon, too-" said Mrs. Sims.

"Yes, so soon, is almost like—like death," concluded Geoffrey.

Mrs. Sims gave a little shiver.

"Don't for goodness' sake, Geff, say such a horrid thing again. I don't like you, even in the sense you mean, to speak of death."

"Then I won't do it. What a nervous little humbug you are," added Geoffrey. "But where's our young son and heir, Kate? Why isn't he at breakfast?"

The son and heir was duly trotted in by Sally Smith, embraced warmly and then trotted off again with his thumb in his mouth, for he declined to be propped up at the table, even with Sally as spoonholder, and kicked valiantly against it until he was let loose.

"What a temper the fellow has!" said Geoffrey.

[&]quot;Temper! Say spirit," suggested Kate.

"All right. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. O Kate, I can exclaim as you did just now, 'how happy I feel.' "

"Do you really?"

"Indeed I do. It may seem heartless from one point of view. I mean considering the fact—that

is, you know-"

- "Yes, I understand, darling; but you have had sadness enough, and suffered enough, dear husband, and you must not grudge yourself all that the present and future may offer. You have no reason to blame yourself for the sad event that has happened, and you may be as sorry as you like in one way and as grateful as you can in the other. I'm getting mixed, too, darling. But we both understand ourselves what we mean, which is that as it has pleased God to permit this awful tragedy, we thank Him that no stain remains to ourselves. Isn't that it?"
 - "Yes, it's something like that."
- "Poor girl, her life must have been so sadsadder than yours, Geoffrey. But we won't talk of it any more."

A silence succeeded for awhile. Then Kate broke it, forgetful of her own caution to avoid the one sad subject. A tear was sparkling in her eve as she asked softly:

"Geoffrey, did you love her much?"

"Yes, very, very much, as one might love a sister-not at all as I love you, dearest one."

And then the subject was dropped.

About seven o'clock that evening, a servant informed Mrs. Sims that a woman was waiting to see her. Mrs. Sims started, and a blush spread all over her face, unnoticed by Geoffrey, who was just at that moment again thinking about his dreams, wondering if the strange news he was to hear could have any relation to the murder. The subject was recurring in his mind so often that he could not help being singularly impressed by it.

His wife, who had left him to see her visitor, returned in a moment, and roused him from his reverie, by exclaiming:

"Geoffrey, I have to ask you to forgive me. In the joy of our meeting, I quite forgot to tell you that a woman called here yesterday to inquire for you. When I saw her, she told me she came from a lady who was lying sick at St. Vincent's Hospital—in danger of death—who wished to see you alone before she died."

"Well, you do look guilty, Kate, certainly. You are flushing all over. But go on. What about it? I don't know any one sick at any hospital so far as I am aware," said Geoffrey, carelessly. "But, hello! about those blushes! What do they mean?"

"Only penitence, Geff, on account of my forgetfulness. The woman is here again, and I think you must see her yourself alone."

"Not a bit of it. She shall come here and tell us both all about it."

Kate led into the room an old woman, evidently a servant, whose first word caused Geoffrey to start. It was only "Monsieur."

"My dream!" he exclaimed, involuntarily.

"Monsieur, the lady from whom I come wishes to see you at once—as soon as you can come. She

fears she is dying. She says you will remember her by this."

The woman handed Geoffrey a card upon which was written:

CHARLOTTE VERNAY.

"Kate, I must go immediately!" he exclaimed, jumping to his feet in great excitement. "This is the most extraordinary thing I have ever known. I will tell you all about it when I return. Don't ask me any questions now, for I don't want to lose a moment. I may be too late, and this may be of the greatest importance."

CHAPTER XXXII.

Into a dark room on the second floor of St. Vincent's Hospital, Geoffrey Sims was ushered by one of the Sisters. It was dimly lighted by an oil lamp placed on a table, close up to which was a large invalid's chair, in which reclined a woman, propped up by pillows. Around her feet was wrapped a warm rug. The dark blue shade of the lamp reflected the light upon a thin pale face, wasted by sickness, pinched looking, care-worn, and penitent. It was the face of Mme. Vernay, without the cunning impudent expression, and softened in some inexplicable way. Geoffrey remembered it hard, bold, defiant. How mild, humble, supplicating now! That was what struck him at his first glance.

He took the seat placed for him at the table opposite Mme. Vernay, who waited for the Sister to withdraw before speaking. Then she said in a low tone:—

"You are vera good to come to me. I was 'fraid you would refuse because—"

"Never mind the past-" said Geoffrey, notic-

ing the sick woman's hesitation.

"Ah! but I muss, sir—I muss. I shall die, I know now; they do not say it, but I feel it is to be, and I muss t'ink of all. I was vera bad—vera bad for your fader and your mudder. And now I repent myself. Ah! I can no t'ink and express in Englis now. I have to say so much t'ings and cannot—to say in Englis. Let me try, sir."

"You may speak your own tongue, Mme. Vernay. It will be easier for you and I can follow you," observed Geoffrey in French. "If it concerns your relations with my poor father, you may spare yourself the trouble. I have no wish to hear it."

"Ah! thank you, sir—thank you. It is generous to say so. You can forgive me, then, all the trouble I have caused your family?" said the poor woman, in French. "I would go down on my knees before you, if I could do so, to ask your pardon."

"If it will do you any good to hear it, I fully forgive whatever wrongs you may have done my mother and father," said Geoffrey, coldly.

"And wrongs to you, too, sir — I have also wronged you, too," said the woman, with an appealing look.

"If you have ever wronged me except through

my parents, I do not know of it. But I freely forgive that, too. And now, madame, why have you summoned me? Tell me as briefly as you can."

"I know I deserve no pity; but be patient with me. I am not strong, I will not waste time in useless words."

Geoffrey bowed his head, and waited.

- "There is no one here but ourselves?" asked Mme. Vernay, looking about the room, uneasily.
 - "No one; we are alone."
 - "No one outside the door?"
- "No one," answered Geoffrey, when he had reclosed the door, after looking into the hall.
- "Then I will tell you at once, Mr. Sims. Your friend, Mr. Fenton, is innocent of the murder of your first wife. I know the murderer—the one, I mean, who caused her death," said Mme. Vernay, almost in a whisper.

It seemed to Geoffrey that the next minute was an hour.

- "Go on, madame, tell me all," he said, in feverish excitement.
- "I am going to tell all, but you must promise not to use it against him. I mean against the person who really caused your wife's death."
- "That is impossible," said Geoffrey, starting up. "Your confession would do no good to my friend unless the real murderer could be pointed out. As you hope to be saved hereafter, I beseech you to tell me all without reservation."
- "Ah! my God, must I then cause another death, too—must I denounce him—bad as he is—and little as I ought to wish to spare his life. Oh! my God! my God!"

"Remember, madame, there is no other way to clear the reputation of an innocent man. If you do not tell the whole truth without reserve you will be responsible for the ruin, and perhaps death, of an innocent man. You do not wish to go before your Creator with such a sin on your soul."

"No, no; no more sin or crime," murmured the woman, shaken with terror. "But think how hard it is to speak against—to brand as a murderer my own—my own— Oh! my God! must it be! Is there no other way?"

"None, I assure you, and I implore you to do this one good deed before you go. God is merciful, but He is also just, and will not pardon one who permits a great wrong to prevail."

"I know, I know. Oh! I know too well. You are right, I must tell all, all, cost what it may."

And the miserable woman sank deeper in the pillow, looking as if about to collapse, Geoffrey was on the point of ringing the bell to summon assistance, but a look from the woman restrained him.

"Do not ring. We must not be disturbed. I must tell all now or never," she said, recovering her strength by a great effort. "Come closer to me, and listen well."

Geoffrey obeyed.

"The day of the murder I was in your wife's apartments. I had been with her all night, the servant having gone away to Quebec. I had given her breakfast—God forgive me—coffee and champagne—"

Geoffrey groaned.

[&]quot;She trusted me completely while I was plot-

ting to ruin her—at least to rob her. The plan agreed upon by my husband and me was to rob her that morning, and to do so successfully, easily, it was necessary to intoxicate her. I attended to that, sir. I tempted her to drink the wine that would blind her to the trick that was to be practiced. The trick was to have a check for nearly all the money to her credit in bank ready for her signature. The check was to be in favor of my husband—''

"Horace Becham?" exclaimed Geoffrey.

"Yes, Horace, it was he. I knew where she kept her check book, and I had already told Horace where he would find it when he came, for I was not to be present. He wished it to be so, and I pretended to consent. I had already stolen a blank check for him, which he was to fill up just before coming, so that it would be ready in his hand to substitute for another check for a small amount-thirty-four dollars-which I had asked her to give to Horace for the relief of a pretended case of distress. One check was for thirty-four thousand—the other for only thirty-four. We both thought that in her generous blindness she would only notice thirty-four on the larger check, if she noticed the figures at all. For indeed she was not likely to pay much attention to the amount. She had a habit of allowing me to fill up her checks for her, and I observed she gave her signature often without looking at the amount I had written. It appears marvelous to you, no doubt, that such a thing could be done; but it was simple enough, and Horace had no doubt that he could manage to substitute the large for the small check, and

cover up the amount either with his hand, or with the blotter, in such a way that the lady would not notice while writing her signature."

"I understand, madame, you need not dwell longer on the point," interrupted Geoffrey.

"Well, sir, some time before the hour when I expected Horace to arrive, your wife was in the condition required for our trick. She was only semi-conscious of what was taking place about her. I was a little afraid she might fall asleep before Horace came, but she did not. When I heard his footsteps coming up the stairs, I ran and hid myself in a closet, from which I could see what would take place. I had promised to leave the house just before the time he would arrive, but I was too much afraid he would make some mistake, and so I hid in the closet. Was I not a very devil to be so determined that the villainy should not fail? Oh! will God ever forgive me?"

She hid her face in her hands, while a tremor shook her frail form. When she was able to continue the confession of her participation in the crime, she said:

"I will not weary you by recounting all the devices my hus— Horace used before he could lead the poor lady to the point he was seeking. I will only say that he found an occasion to repeat the doleful tale of the pretended case of distress, which I had already described to her.

"I saw her half rise, and then fall back on the sofa. I knew what was in her mind. She wanted to go for her check-book. I heard Horace say:

[&]quot;'Can I do anything for you?'

- "'If your wife was here, I would ask her to get my check-book,' she replied.
 - "'Let me get it for you,' he said.
- "'Thank you. I feel heavy this morning. You will find it over there. Please bring it to me."
 - "Horace placed the book before her, and said:
- "'Do you wish to write a check for any purpose? If so, let me be your clerk. I will fill it up for you.'
- "The door of the closet in which I waited was just sufficiently ajar to let me look out, and I could see him and her distinctly. I saw her nod assent to his proposal to act as clerk. I saw him sit down and take the pen. I saw his hand shake a little, and it made me tremble myself. He wrote quickly, however, and then held the check book for her to read.
 - "'Is that all right?' he asked.
- "'Yes, thank you. Thirty-four dollars is the amount your wife spoke of,' she replied.
- "'I am deeply obliged for your generous contribution,' I heard him say.
- "Then he tore the check from the book and in a second substituted another—the one he had prepared before coming—for thirty-four thousand.
- "He placed it before her to sign in the way he had told me he would do, and she wrote her name at once.
- "He placed the check in his pocket and breathed a great sigh of relief. I could see by his face at this moment how flushed and excited he was, while I, wretch that I was, was thinking how much cooler and braver I would have been in his place. Yes, I gloried in the idea of my own bad superiority.

- "He had left his hat and cane in another part of the room, and went to get them.
- "I don't know why it was, but in that moment when I saw your wife reach her hand for the check book and open it I had some curious presentiment that something evil was going to happen. She turned over the stubs, and I saw her start, her face flush with surprise or anger, and her eyes turn toward where my husband was standing nervously rubbing his hat.
 - "'Mr. Becham!"
- "He turned at once on hearing your wife call him in a very unusual tone, and he walked quickly to the table. She had risen, supporting herself with her hands.
- "'How much was that check for, Mr. Becham?' she asked.
 - "Thirty-four dollars."
- "'Please let me see it.' All her coolness and clearness seemed to have returned. In a moment the wine effects had vanished. Horace hesitated, and she repeated her request.
- "'Let me see that check. I think you have made a mistake, for the stub has thirty-four thousand instead of thirty-four dollars.'
- "'Indeed! you read the check yourself. Don't you remember. You must be mistaken. Let me look at the stub.'
- "'The devil! so it has thirty-four thousand. That is curious."
- "I almost fell in the excitement that his exclamation caused me. I was angry at him. He had made a tremendous blunder evidently. In his agitation preparing the small check, he had written

the larger amount on the stub. My hand clutched the revolver I had in my pocket—one that I had brought with me with some crazy thought that it might be useful to myself. Why did I clutch it then? I am not sure, but I had a temptation to kill him. Certainly I drew it from my pocket and held it ready in my hand.

- "'You can see the check for yourself,' he said quickly. 'Look at it. It is only for thirty-four dollars.'
- "I breathed freely again. He was saved, as I thought, and in my excitement the pistol dropped from my hand to the floor, falling on some clothes, but distinctly making a sound, though a dull one. Horace turned quickly with an expression of fear on his face. He had heard the noise, but just as I thought he was about to search for its cause, your wife spoke.
- "'This is not signed by me. There is another check. Something is wrong. Give it to me.'
- "He had made bad worse, and was now completely confused.
- "'That is the only check. If you have not signed it, why, never mind. Don't trouble about it. Some other time you can give me the amount.'
- "He moved toward the door to go out. Then your wife, who had been unable to stand at the table a few minutes before, ran to the door before he could reach it. I was paralyzed by this extraordinary movement.
- "'You will please deliver that other check to me before you leave this room.'
 - "Oh! if she had not done that, all would have

been well-at least there would have been no tragedy!

"Horace caught her by the arms and moved her

back to the sofa.

"'Are you crazy?' he cried. 'Remain there quietly, or it will be worse for you.'

- "'You cowardly ruffian! Do you think you can frighten me? I signed that check without understanding the amount. Return it to me at once, or I will give the alarm.'
- "'You are mistaken. Your mind is wandering. Keep quiet,' he said, in an angry voice.

"Again he went to the door.

- "This time your wife did not follow him, but ran to the window, crying: 'Help! help!' as loudly as she could. Horace turned back, put one hand over her mouth to stop her outcry, and forced her back to the sofa. She still struggled and cried.
- "Then Horace, O God! put his hands around her throat! I don't know whether he intended to strangle her or not. But I know I was so frightened myself that I could not stir or shriek when I saw the look on his face."

"My God!" exclaimed Geoffrey.

- "Must I go on? Shall I tell the rest?" asked Mme. Vernay. "Is it not too horrible for you to hear?"
 - "Tell all, tell all," answered Geoffrey.
- "Ah! would to God there was no more to tell! There was soon no sound but the breathing of Horace. Her strugglings and moans were soon over, and he took his great strong hands from her throat. Oh! will I ever forget his face at that moment,

when he turned around and looked through the room? It was the face of a murderer! I knew he had killed her with those hands, and yet my heart was so hard, so devilish, that I felt no pity—only fear for myself. If he should see me there, the witness of his crime, I felt he would kill me, too, and yet I had not the courage to stoop down and pick up the pistol. No, I was afraid to move.

"'She is dead! I have killed her!' escaped his lips only in a whisper. Still he started at the sound, and ran to the door, closing it noiselessly though quickly behind him. I knew what he would do then. He would go to our house to find me—to flee with me. For some moments I remained still in the closet, afraid to open the door—afraid to decide what I would do for myself. Would I run away where I would never see him more, or would I return to the house where I promised to meet him? I decided not to abandon him, though I was afraid to meet him again lest he should see in my face what I knew. But perhaps he would tell me all, and then I would have time to decide what I would do myself.

"So I ran into the street. It was only a few minutes after himself. I believed he would walk or run home. It was necessary I should get there before him, or he might suspect. So I went in a direction where I could be sure not to meet him, and I hired a carriage to drive me with all speed to the house. I got there first, bathed my face, and prepared myself to look as calm as possible before his return. Oh! how changed looking he appeared when at last he came into the room! His eyes were wild and staring, and his mouth, oh! I

don't know how to describe it, so hard and cruel, and yet the lips were twitching. Ifelt myself shrink a little when he put his hand on my shoulder and hissed into my ear:

- "Charlotte, we must leave here this instant."
- "Then it is done. You have succeeded?"
- "I was astonished at my own calmness.
- "Succeeded! oh! yes, but we must lose no time. It is dangerous to remain. D—n it, don't you hear?'
- "" Of course I know. But we need not act like criminals," I replied, coolly.
- "'Criminals! what do you mean? Criminals! Ha! ha! That's what we are. Come. I'm going now. There's no time for gab.'
- "'You've got the money?' I said. 'You've cashed the check?' My nerve was coming back wonderfully.
- "'I'll be d—d if I —. I mean, of course, I have. But don't bother me now with any more questions."
 - "Though I knew he was lying, I said no more.
- "I did not express any wonder, even when he threw off his usual street suit and disguised himself very cleverly by shaving off his hair and whiskers, coloring his eye-brows and eye-lashes gray to match a wig of long flowing gray hair. When he put on an old-fashioned suit and a pair of green spectacles it was impossible to see any resemblance to Horace Becham, the detective. I made some alterations in my own dress to match his own, and I saw when he glared at me that he considered my own disguise as sufficient. Alas! I had learned the art of disguise before misfortune threw me in his path!

"Well, sir, we went to Quebec first, and waited two days for a vessel that was bound for Boston. The murder had evidently not yet been discovered, and as Corinne Regnier had buried her sister and was ready to go back to Montreal, I persuaded her to come with us to the States by representing that your wife had gone with Mr. Fenton to New York. She did not recognize Horace, for I represented him as my brother, and told her I had left Becham forever. The good soul was easily deceived and prevailed upon to call me Mme. Deshon, never Becham any more, so that my husband might not learn where I was. We thought it best to prevent her going back to the house in Montreal. She might suspect me, if not Horace, when she learned of the murder. As Horace kept away from us on the steamer, it was easy to prevent Corinne from identifying him.

"Then when we got to Boston, he went to one place, I to another. His opinion was it would be safer to be thus separated. Of course by agreement we met every day for consultation always at a different place, and he was always in a new disguise, so perfectly done that I did not know him till he spoke. I felt he was afraid of me, and as I did not like the expression that sometimes came into his eyes when he looked at me, I resolved to part company with him the first good opportunity that presented.

My idea was to run away to New York with Corinne, and from there to go to my native country, France. I had a large part of his money about me, besides a good deal of my own in bank in New York. In that city—I mean here—I knew a place

where I could keep Corinne away from everybody likely to talk of the murder—until I should get safely away. In Boston I had no such resource. I was obliged to have her always under my own eye. What would happen to her after I got away did not trouble me then. I was on the point of putting this scheme into execution when Horace told me what his plan of escape was, and that he was going to New York to carry it out. He informed me that his brother commanded a vessel engaged in the trade between New York and South American ports, and that the vessel was at its dock in Brooklyn.

"'We will go there,' he said, 'Brother Bill will take care of us. We can go to South America and start in something down there, somewhere.'

"So we went to New York together, and we kept together. He did not give me any chance to separate from him there. When I told him I wanted to get rid of Corinne until our plans were sure, he insisted upon going with me to the place I proposed to leave her. He was willing enough to leave Corinne in the place I had fixed upon, but he was not willing to lose sight of me an hour. So I had to submit.

"It was about eleven o'clock at night when we started for Brooklyn, and when we got there the ship was not at her dock but in mid-stream. He was irritated at this and still more so when he found difficulty in getting a boatman to row us out. Then a terrible disappointment awaited him. When the boatman heard the name of the vessel he wanted to go to, he declined to row us at all.

He said it had had yellow fever on it—that the captain and first mate had died at sea.

"'What was the captain's name?' Horace

asked desperately.

"'Captain William Becham,' was the answer.

"'Curse you for that,' cried Horace, striking the boatman fiercely and knocking him down.

"'Come on,' he said to me. 'It's all up.

D-n them all-d-n everything, everybody.'

"He seemed wild with rage and disappointment,

and was disposed to vent them on my head.

- "I was very angry myself, and forgot my fear of him in the indignation his coarseness to me produced, and tried to keep away from him when we got on the ferryboat. He went out and sat on the big iron chain at the end of the boat near the water. I remained outside, too, but near the door of the ladies' cabin. I was ashamed to go inside, lest he should follow and abuse me. I actually hoped he was thinking of suicide by drowning himself, but if he had such a thought at first, he resisted it. He turned and saw me.
 - "'Come here, you-' he cried, savagely.

"I made no reply.

- "'Why don't you come, you hell's bird? Are you afraid?'
- "His manner roused all the courage in me, and I calmly walked toward him.

"'What do you want?' I demanded.

- "'I want to know if you have any plan to save us. My last is buried with Bill. Tell me quick what's in your mind.'
- "'What do you mean by us?' I asked tauntingly. 'I don't need to be saved. I have done

nothing wrong. If you have, I'm willing to do what I can to help you, when you ask me in a proper way.'

- "'What do you mean by grinning at me like a monkey? You're in the business as well as I, be George,' he retorted.
- "'No, I'm not in it. I had no part in what you did. I never advised that.'
- "'That! that! what's that, you devil? Oh! I see. You've been reading the newspapers, and pretending you didn't all the time.'
- "'Perhaps I have, but it was not necessary to read the papers. I knew it before,' I said in a way that I saw staggered him. He reeled back from me, but recovered himself and hissed at me fiercely—
 - "'What do you mean?'
- "I was too much incensed to think of the consequences of the words I next uttered loudly enough to be heard by anybody who might have been on deck.
- "'I saw you strangle her with my own eyes. I was in the closet at the time."
- "Before I could turn he was at my throat, with his cruel hands grasping me so tightly I could not utter a sound. He dragged me out to the end of the boat, and jumped, still holding me, into the water. I don't know whether he struck me or whether I knocked my head against some part of the boat. I was knocked or struck on my head in some way and lost my senses at once. But I was not to die that way. It seems I was picked up by some people in a pleasure boat, taken ashore, and left at this hospital, through the kindness of a

charitable lady who was on the boat that saved me.

- "When I recovered, I sent for Corinne Regnier, and begged the good Sisters to allow her to remain with me and nurse me. It was the first good act I had done in years, for my notion was to protect the good old soul by leaving her all I had in case I should die. Oh! if I only had her innocence and simple goodness, how happy I would be. Now I have told you all, Mr. Sims, and I pray God you can still forgive me. Oh! if you could know how I have suffered you would pity me!"
- "You have not yet told me about your husband. What has become of him? Do you know where he is?" asked Geoffrey.
- "Alas! I have never heard," she answered with a sigh.
- "Then I suppose we must take it for granted he is dead?" he asked.
- "I do not believe it—I cannot think it, because I do not feel he is dead. He was an excellent swimmer, and I think he would have reached shore, for we were not far out when we went overboard."
- "Was there no account of the ferryboat incident published at the time?"
- "I only know what I have been told—that a day or two after, the papers said a crazy man had attempted to commit suicide and jumped overboard; that his wife, who tried to save him, was dragged into the water with him, but was rescued. From this I imagine we must have been seen by somebody on the ferryboat. He knew he could

swim to shore, while he thought I would be drowned before being rescued."

"The cowardly brute!" exclaimed Geoffrey.

- "Yes, he was a brute then, but remember also that I was no better. I know now I was a very devil, and how can I blame him when I think how his mind was crazed by fear of arrest and death. Perhaps he too, has been changed by the mercy of God. I love him now, and pray for his salvation. I would save him from death, too, if he still lives, but that is impossible, I suppose. If they capture him, there will be no mercy. But he will have time to repent and die bravely, as I hope to die, and with the pardon of God."
- "You spoke of a pistol, Mme. Vernay. Can you tell me anything about it? Was there any mark on it?" asked Geoffrey eagerly.
- "Yes, there were two letters engraved on the handle—G. F.—Horace used to keep it in his drawer during the day—indeed always kept it there—except on rare occasions when he had to be out late at night in dangerous places."
- "Did he have the pistol long in his possession?" he inquired next.
- "As long as I knew him—at least I saw it shortly after we became intimate."
- "And do you know how he obtained it? You see the initials are not his, and it is rather curious that he should own a weapon with another's initials on it."
- "No, he never told me about that. Do you know anything about it? Whose initials are they?"

[&]quot;Mr. George Fenton's."

"He may have stolen it. It is possible," she murmured faintly. "I have no more to tell you, I am tired—tired now—oh! so tired. Tell me before you go that you forgive me."

"I do-fully," he answered.

"And that you will pray for me-"

"Yes, and that others, whose prayers will be more acceptable than mine, will pray for you also."

"Thank you—oh! thank you."
She raised his hand to her lips and kissed it.
Tears fell on his hand.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was very late when our friend Geoffrey emerged from the hospital. The confession had occupied hours. He looked at his watch and found it nearly ten o'clock.

"Too late to do anything to-night," he said, surprised and disappointed that the night was so far advanced. "The deposition will have to wait till morning."

His ideas about the law were not very clear, but he had a notion that the proper thing to be done was to have the confession put into the form of a deposition as quickly as possible and acknowledged before a notary public. Mme. Vernay might die at any moment, and then— Well, he did not know what might be the consequences then. They might, perhaps, take his own affidavit, embodying the points of the woman's confession, or they

might not. Heaven only knew what hocus-pocus the lawyer chaps would be up to.

His elation, however, was too deep to be shattered so soon by mere vague possibilities.

"She can't be in much present danger, I'm sure, or they would not have her sitting up as I found her. No, the thing is all right. Dear old George's name is cleared, and I'm the happiest man in the world to-night. Won't Kate be delighted? Won't I astonish her when I tell her about my dreams?"

When he reached his house, an express wagon was before the door, and the servants were helping to carry trunks into the hall. Paying no attention to this, he fairly leaped upstairs with noiseless bounds, and stole into his wife's boudoir. He wanted to surprise Kate. The light was lowered, and in a chair he saw some one seated, holding the precious son and heir asleep in her arms. Of course it must be Kate. Who else had a right to be there at such an hour, with the babe in her arms? On tip-toe he advanced until he stood behind the chair. Then he threw his arms about the neck of its occupant with a quick, cautious movement. A scream of terror, a squall from the awakened son and heir, and he found himself with one hand catching at the baby while the other clung to his mother's neck.

"Oh! Geoffrey, my son, is it you? What a fright you gave me!"

"Dear, dear mother, what a joyful surprise!" he exclaimed, embracing her affectionately. "Forgive me for alarming you. I really thought you were Kate, sitting there so quietly with Geffy."

He reached his hand up to the chandelier and turned on the light more brightly.

"Let me have a good look at you. How well and strong you are, dear mother, and how glad I am to see you!"

He knelt down by her side and kissed her hand just as he had done when a boy.

"I think this is really one of the happiest moments of my life, dear mother. To find you here, and to have such good news to tell—"

"Geoffrey!" cried Kate, who had been watching the little scene from her bedroom, and now advanced joyfully, "what is your news? I see, by your face it's something very, very good."

"That it is, indeed, my love," he said, springing to his feet. "When I tell you that I have seen the murderer's wife—that she told me all about the crime—that she saw the deed committed with her own eyes, and that the least stain is removed from George, you will admit I have good reason to be elated."

Then suddenly all three became very grave, for the recollection of Sophie and the tragic ending of her sad young life were brought vividly before them by the involuntary exclamation of the elder Mrs. Sims.

It was only "Poor girl!" she had murmured, but with such deep feeling that Geoffrey and Kate were unable to speak for some moments. It seemed to the young man that he had been speaking of a solemn subject with too much lightness, and the "poor girl" was a sort of rebuke to him. This was why his description of the interview with Mme. Vernay became so thrillingly pathetic, and

caused the tears of v and mother to flow so copiously. At its conclusion the elder lady said:—

"The judgments of the Almighty are sometimes slow but always sure, my children. His mercy is no less certain, when there is true repentance."

She was thinking of Mme. Vernay and her own dead husband. Was there not another murder, too, which might be laid at the door of that repentant woman?

"We must be merciful ourselves, my children, to deserve the mercy of God. We must pray for all who need it."

There was a solemn "Good-night," and Geoffrey was left free to prepare a dispatch he wished to send to Mr. Cramson communicating the salient points of the night's developments, and asking to be instructed as to the steps necessary to be taken. He sent it off and then went to his bedroom.

"Every sweet has its bitter—every joy its pain."

So thought Geoffrey as he criticised what he called his own levity.

"What a saintly mother is mine," he said.

"If all the world were like her, there would be no pain."

His eyes fell on his wife sleeping peacefully, with an angelic smile on her face. It was very, very late; still he bent over and kissed the smiling lips softly. Soft as it was, however, it awoke her, and she murmured:

"Oh, Geoffrey! Geoffrey! I am so happy, I could cry."

The morning following an answer came to him from Mr. Cramson, as follows:

"Confession of wife cannot be used as evidence. But have it prepared and sworn to before notary. It may be valuable otherwise. A wife's statement against a husband is inadmissible as evidence. Fenton and Goss much gratified. Inquest will be again postponed until I can consult with you in New York. Please remain there. I leave at once."

With solemn visage he showed the message to his wife, saying:

"There's a fine setback for us. What rot the law is, after all. Just think of it, we can't use the truth in evidence because she happens to be his wife. Isn't it absurd?"

Kate reflected for some moments before answering.

Her husband was amazed that she hesitated an instant to agree with him.

- "Geoffrey, suppose, you dear old thing—suppose I were to do something very, very wrong—"she began.
 - "Absurd!" he exclaimed.
- "I only say suppose I were to become a criminal—"
- "A burglar, or a highwayman!" he sug-
- "Be quiet, and don't interrupt, sir," she persisted. "If I were a prisoner, and your testimony necessary to convict me, would you, sir—would you like to give it?"
 - "Of course not. I would pull out my tongue

first—pull it out by the roots," said Geoffrey energetically.

- "And you wouldn't like me to testify against you, would you?"
 - "Eh?"
- "You know you wouldn't, sir. It would break your dear old heart, and mine too."
- "Oh! well, the cases are different. There's no probability you would ever do anything naughty. You might, it is true, turn cannibal, and devour me and the young pumpkin, and then I couldn't testify against you when the law got hold of you. But your reasons are no reasons at all, my dear—at least only women's reasons, which amounts to the same thing. Kate, you know, the argument only amounts to this: Because you wouldn't like to do certain things, therefore, it would be wrong to force you."
- "The dear, delightful, darling old Dogberry wants to crush us, does it?" exclaimed Kate. "Don't you see there's sense in the law? If you do not, I certainly do, and I think it is even holy."
- "Well, maybe I do agree with you, after all," said Geoffrey. "Anyhow, for the sake of peace in the family, I won't persist in arguing against you. Let us kiss and be friends."

"You old humbug!" cried Kate.

But the kisses were given.

The chill of Cramson's wet blanket was quite cured by this little connubial discussion of the law, and Geoffrey waited for the lawyer's arrival without impatience. As the reports from the hospital concerning the condition of Mme. Vernay were not

alarming, he delayed also having the deposition acknowledged. One blunder about the law was sufficient for him. He was loath to risk the chance of committing another. So when Mr. Cramson appeared and glanced over the deposition, Geoffrey was much gratified to hear the eminent authority say:

"That's capital—in excellent shape. I'm glad you kept it, for it gives me an excuse for seeing the woman. One never can tell what may happen, you know."

So they went to the hospital together.

They found Mme. Vernay propped up in her chair just as she had been before, only she looked thinner and paler in the clear light of day. A prayer-book and a crucifix were on the table by her side.

As Geoffrey advanced she gave a faint smile of recognition and her lips moved as if speaking, but the words were inaudible. Corinne Regnier, who had been standing at her side, left the room.

After introducing Mr. Cramson, Geoffrey said: "We have brought the deposition for you to

sign as soon as you have read it."

She inclined her head in assent, and Mr. Cramson proceeded to read the paper in an impressive manner. When he had finished he asked her if it was correct. Again she nodded assent, the notary was called in, and the paper signed and acknowledged. When the notary withdrew, Mr. Cramson observed—

"I am sorry, madame, you cannot tell us where Mr. Becham is."

"I am very sorry, too, sir, but I cannot aid you

more. I know not where he can be. If dat I knew I would say—indeed I would," she replied in almost a whisper.

"It is greatly to be regretted, because though your statement relieves Mr. Fenton from the unjust suspicion that was thrown on him, still it cannot be used as evidence. You know, of course, a wife's testimony cannot be used against her husband under our laws."

An extraordinary change at once took place in the woman's face at this statement of the lawyer. Her head sank back and she seemed to be enduring sudden pangs of the most painful character. She closed her eyes and wrung her hands convulsively.

"Ah! mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" she moaned piteously.

The two witnesses of her agony were astounded. What could it mean?

Geoffrey touched her lightly on the shoulder, and the writhing ceased. She bit her lips and clutched the arms of her chair as if struggling to make some momentous resolution.

"Try to be calm, madame," said Geoffrey soothingly.

An expression of heart-broken appeal came to her eyes.

- "You say ze vife can no make—ah!—témoignage against ze husband. Is not dat what you say, monsieur?" she asked, turning her eyes upon Mr. Cramson.
- "Yes, madame, under our laws it is not permitted."
- "Den muss I tell more—more—all. I did deceive Horace. He is not my true husband in law.

When I marry him, Achille—my udder husband—live in France. Ah! mon Dieu! dis is terrible, terrible," gasped Mme. Vernay.

Mr. Cramson advanced toward her a few steps

"Do you mean you had another husband living at the time a marriage ceremony between you and Becham was performed? Is that it, madame?" he asked.

"Oui! monsieur, oui! Ah! oui! Grace, mon Dieu! grace!"

"And does that first husband still live?"

"So I believe. I have not hear he die. I t'ink Achille Vernay, he still live in Dijon, France."

"Mr. Sims," said the lawyer, "will you oblige me by seeing if the notary is still here. Ask him to remain a few minutes longer. We must add something to our deposition."

Madame Vernay remained perfectly still while the lawyer wrote the necessary additions to the deposition. She lay back on her pillows with closed eyes, but the twitchings about her mouth occasionally showed that the struggle was still going on within. If the lawyer could have read her mind he would have known that she was then crying out:

"Ah! have mercy, oh! my God. Have mercy! Pity me, save me! My crimes have been great, but my repentance is bitter. Pity me, and pity him. Save him. Poor Horace! Poor Achille!"

The paper was soon in the shape required, and again sworn to and acknowledged before the recalled notary.

"Do you think you could go to Montreal, Mme. Vernay, next week? Do you think you will be strong enough to travel then?" asked Mr. Cramson.

"Oh! monsieur, I think I die. I fear nevair I will go out again before my coffin. Look at me. Do you t'ink I am not dying now—dat I will not go before my God soon—ah! too soon—for I have not yet prepare enough."

"No, I do not think so," said Mr. Cramson decisively. "Your soul is sicker than your body. You will get well, madame, and you will have ample time for repentance. You have done well in telling all. You have deserved forgiveness here and hereafter. God will reward you, madame."

"I bless you, monsieur, I bless you. It is possible God will permit that I live. But you say I muss go to Montreal again. Ah! I could not, monsieur. Dat would be terrible."

"I know it will be a painful ordeal, but for the ends of justice it is necessary. Accustom yourself then to the thought, and try to get strong quick."

"It is nécessaire—absolument?" asked the woman.

"Not absolutely necessary, but it would be better and more convenient. If you are not able to go, we will have to take your testimony by commission. That is all."

"I will try, monsieur, I will try. Do with me as may be nécessaire. I will suffer for sake of God."

"And for the sake of the innocent, too," added Cramson.

"Soit," murmured the woman, with clasped hands.

They took their leave, and went out of the hospital.

"You think she will be able to go to Canada?" asked Geoffrey, when they were in the street.

"Decidedly. There is no death in her eyes. She will live to repent for many years. Her malady is mental, not physical. She may lose her reason through religious enthusiasm, for repentance with people of such lives as hers has been sometimes runs into madness."

"How lucky it was you saw her," said Geoffrey, deferentially. "It has been George's salvation. No doubtful verdict would ever satisfy one of his nature."

"You are right. He is, perhaps, as sensitive and high strung as yourself. But now all is plain sailing, and I congratulate you, my dear young friend, on your success."

"My success!" repeated Geoffrey, blushing.
"Pshaw! my part was all chance. All the credit is yours."

"My dear boy, if you had not been there, it would never have come out. Do you know what did it? It was the touch of your hand on her shoulder. I saw her resolution form on the instant. I can't explain it, but I saw it, as certainly as I see you now."

Let us spare the reader a description of the closing scenes of the inquest that followed not long after. As Mr. Cramson had predicted, the French-woman regained strength and was able to give her testimony before the coroner's jury, whose verdict found that "the deceased came to her death by the hands of Horace Becham."

And George Fenton walked forth without a stain. Among all his friends there was not one whose congratulations were more sincere than those of the sturdy Major Goss, chief of police.

"I never doubted your innocence for a moment after the first day, and even on the first day I could not believe you guilty," the major declared, wringing Fenton's hand warmly.

There had been a perfect exodus of friends from New York who decided to be present at George Fenton's vindication, and when the verdict was rendered they carried him in triumph from the court-house to the hotel. Mrs. Geoffrey Sims, Jr.; Mrs. Geoffrey Sims, Sr.; Miss Remsford, Mrs. Remsford and her husband were all there to greet him.

"I can offer you an unstained name now," he whispered to Ada, after bestowing a chaste embrace on the shy little brunette, who hung back on the outer edge of the circle until Kate had led her by gentle force before the proud young broker.

"No more unstained now than before, dear George," she answered. "There never was a blot in my estimation."

"Kiss him, Kate," Geoffrey had said to his wife a moment before.

"Indeed I will," she responded, "and hug him, too."

George had never submitted to such caresses from women, old and young, during his whole life, as then. For on his part it appeared to be passive, except when dear old Mrs. Sims folded him in her arms and sobbed:

"My dear child, you are my second son. All

you have suffered for the sake of my first endears you to my heart."

He was then really touched—a few tears dropped from his eyes, and he said:

"I will always be proud of such a mother."

"He is going to be my son, Mrs. Sims," Mr. Cramson declared. "I refuse to allow him ever to re-enter his old den. Only sad memories could come to him there. He and I are a pair of gray-headed bachelors, and we'll hive together hereafter. He needs a young fellow like me to stir him up. Promise you will share my home, George. Say you'll come."

"I promise," replied Fenton, pleasantly, "if you think you can bear with a queer fellow like me—I promise to abide with you until the happy day—"

He looked toward Ada, who was again hovering on the outer edge of the happy circle. There was a crimson blush on her cheek; so he left the sentence unfinished.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THAT George Fenton, instead of getting married at once after returning to New York, should take up his abode with Mr. Cramson was generally regarded as a mark of eccentricity. What could a young broker have in common with a lawyer old enough to be his father and in no way related to him by blood? Ought he not rather to have gone, if he needed sympathy and care, to the home of his old friend Geoffrey Sims, or to any one of a score

of other cheerful homes, where were youth and joy and all the delightful distractions to woo the mind and heart from melanchely morbidness?

When it was seen that in addition to the liberal reward authorized by Geoffrey Sims for Becham's capture, Fenton had also offered another, people shook their heads and whispered that the ex-broker's mind must be a little disordered. It was bad enough that he had given up business and abandoned "the Street." But then he was very rich and could afford to retire if it so pleased him. But to offer a reward!—well, what could he be thinking of?

He gave more cause for criticism by the new mode of life he adopted. Instead of rushing to the solace society would have been only too glad to afford—instead of getting married, as he ought to have done—he plunged into curious studies only interrupted occasionally by fitful wanderings, alone, after curious interviews with mysterious people. Often he revisited Canada. Two or three times it was known he had gone to Europe, though no one met him there, that is, none of his friends.

Why was he acting so strangely? Even Geoffrey could not make it out.

Society was prone to lay the blame on Cramson. It must be the old lawyer who had put such strange fancies into George Fenton's head. Who else could it be?

But Mr. Cramson was not responsible for the change. He deplored it more than all the rest perhaps, for a deep affection was in his heart for George Fenton, whom he regarded as a son, and

who was in turn loved by his young companion as a father. Still if he had not caused the change, he knew what had, but kept the knowledge to himself. At the same time he was as powerless to remove it as Geoffrey or Kate or Ada, or any other of the warm friends interested in the ex-broker's welfare. He cherished the hope, nevertheless, that time would cure what injudicious meddling and expostulations might only make more enduring.

Time rolled on, however—a year, and then another year, without effecting the cure hoped for. And all this time a young lady was waiting with a sad heart—a young lady whom George Fenton had asked to be his wife, and to whom he would have already been married, beyond a doubt, but for the terrible Montreal tragedy. The engagement had not been broken off—its realization was only postponed; but in such an indefinite, unsatisfactory way that the young lady's heart was sick. He came and went often and often to the Remsford residence. He was kind and tenderly solicitous, but there was no talk of fixing a day.

And yet Ada could not cast him off. Her heart was too deeply affected for that final step, much as she felt she ought to release him or he ought to explain and end the delicate and embarrassing position of both.

Had it not been for Mr. Cramson's statement that Fenton was the victim of a strange malady which time only could cure, perhaps she would have forced some explanation during some one of her fits of depression. But the lawyer's assurance always sustained her at the critical moment, and gave hope that "a little longer, a little longer, and

all will be well." If he were really ill was it not her duty to wait?

But after two years even Mr. Cramson thought the time had come when something must be done some violent move made which would force George Fenton to action.

The lawyer's house, where the ex-broker now spent his days, stood on a street near the old University on Washington Square. It was unusually large for a city house, having a frontage of thirty feet and running back some eighty. It was two stories above the basement floor, but the stories were high and the rooms large and airy. It was an old house, put up at a time when New Yorkers, that is to say, our grandfathers and grandmothers, appreciated the solid residential comforts of life more than æsthetic efforts in cramped quarters.

Mr. Cramson had gathered many beautiful articles about him-statuary, rare paintings and exquisite engravings, for which he had a passion almost equaling that for books. Splendid Persian rugs covered his floors; costly portieres hung between the rooms in place of doors, and indeed scarcely anything outside his library suggested the home of a lawyer. It was only upstairs, in that spacious front room whose walls were lined with well-filled bookcases from floor to ceiling, that the calling of Cramson would have been suspected by a stranger. The character of the books disclosed the lawyer; the portraits of judges and great legal luminaries would only have been gathered in such abundance by a man devoted to law.

He was fond of the poets, too, and of the Bible.

Rare editions of Shakespeare were scattered among the law books, and a Bible was nearly always on his desk; he had constant use for it; never a whole day went by without looking into one or other for inspiration. His fellow pleaders always looked for some brilliant use of Shakespeare or Holy Writ in the masterly addresses to court and jury to which they delighted to listen. For Cramson had the art of magnetizing his hearers, and of disarming envy or anger, even after the hottest of contests with his brethren. He was that rare lawyer who had no enemies, and an army of imitators in his own profession.

It was evening in the library. Cramson and Fenton sat opposite each other in easy armchairs. They had dined, and the old lawyer was enjoying his cigar, sipping occasionally from a tumbler of hot punch at his side. The punch and the cigar were the favorite sedatives of the distinguished advocate after his busy days of legal strife. He seemed to be in a dreamy mood, though every little while his gaze rested on Fenton, who was deep in one of Gaborian's detective romances.

"You pore too much, George," said the lawyer after one of these glances. "Here we are only just after dinner, and already you are steeped in your book. It is not well, my boy. A time for everything and everything in its proper season."

"Oh! this is only a novel," answered Fenton, smiling affectionately at his old friend, but closing

the book nevertheless out of deference.

"Yes, I know it's a novel, but of a kind that keeps the eternal business before your mind. Do you imagine I don't understand why you take to

authors like Gaborian for your intellectual pabulum? The old old business, George. Ah! if you were truly wise, you would throw the business to the winds, once and forever. You see, my boy, you are allowing one unhappy episode to absorb too much of your life. It is time to change all that. Why only think of it, George, we have been living here together for two whole years, and I am beginning to fear your coming was a great mistake for yourself. More cheerful surroundings would have been better for you. It was selfish to appropriate you as I have done."

"My dear old friend, you must not imagine such a thing. I am sure, quite sure, I would not have been half so happy anywhere else. You have been the kindest and best of friends. You have been more—a father," said Fenton, eagerly.

The lawyer puffed his cigar energetically before again speaking.

"Well then, George, if I have been as a father to you—if you really feel as a son—let me exercise a father's privilege of scolding. I'm going to talk savagely. Prepare to be castigated. Bare your back for the scourge."

"All right. Don't spare the lash, if you think I need it," George smilingly answered.

Cramson puffed away again, and more furiously. He finished his punch at one swallow. Then he looked so serious that George moved uneasily in his chair, more than half suspecting what direction the scolding was about to take.

"My dear boy, as I said just now, it is time for all this mawkisk nonsense to cease. That's my first or preparatory lash. I told you I was going to lay it on savagely, and you see I am. I call this conduct of yours downright mawkishness. You have allowed yourself to run into criminal morbidity—I believe that's the kind of word a doctor would use—for which there is only one remedy. Do you understand me?—only one remedy."

George flushed, but not with anger. He was

surprised at his friend's earnestness.

"Do you think I can remain silent any longer, my boy? Impossible. I must speak and tell you frankly that during these two years you have been permitting mawkish sentimentality to warp judgment, heart, and honorable delicacy. Every day of these two years has been a wrong to her to whom you are in honor pledged. Go to her then, and make reparation. Your procrastination has been absurdly unreasonable. Something is due to the living as well as to the dead."

Mr. Cramson struck his hand on the table as if in real anger and indignation. George was shocked at his friend's unusual tone, and stammered:

"I_I_"

- "Yes, I know what you will say. You will tell me again of your dead heart, of your buried love, and all the rest of that driveling nonsense; but please spare me. There will be another buried heart—another dead love soon, if you don't shake off this nightmare. What are you thinking of to treat a good, pure, beautiful girl like Ada as if she was only a mere toy for you to play with like a willful boy?"
 - "I have never thought—" Fenton began again.
- "No, of course you have not. You have been so steeped in your morbidity that your eyes were

blinded to what everybody else saw, and your ears deaf to what everybody else was saying—yes, and is saying now."

"I don't understand," interrupted Fenton, very

much excited, "Do you mean-?"

"I mean that the world is saying or hinting cruel things of her as well as of yourself. Is it manly to permit that? Can you reconcile it with your ideas of honor?"

Fenton was startled. The mist of error was fading before the clear light of truth. Ada injured! Ada exposed to painful misconceptions! It should not be—it must not be. No, he would put an end to all that at once.

The lawyer saw his blows were telling and continued, redoubling them. He had hardly expected such quick results.

"It may be," said George, with an effort, "that I have been too self-absorbed—thinking too much of myself and too little of others. It must be so since you say it. And—if you think I ought to—to—"

"I do think it, my boy. I think you ought not to pass another day without going to Ada and asking her—on your knees—to name the day—an early day, too. The sooner the better, even though I have to lose you myself."

"An early day!" echoed Fenton. "Ah! yes, you are right. I have been blind and inconsiderate. Poor Ada!" he excl imed aloud with his lips, while in his heart there was the silent cry of "Poor Sophie!"

Mr. Cramson got up and wrung George's hand. "My son, I am delighted you have at last

shaken off this nightmare. Come, we will go walk. You shall do no more somber thinking tonight. Come out with me."

And out they went, George suffering himself to be led without observing where. He was thinking with wonder of the extraordinary change that had come over him since the tragic death of Sophie—especially since his return to New York. He had believed—and had even been ashamed of himself for believing—that his love for Sophie had fled with her beauty, and he had been ready to marry Ada in a pure spirit of unselfishness, for well he knew he could never give her the whole heart her own deep love deserved. But with Sophie's death, the intense love he had felt for her revived and embalmed her memory in his heart. When he and Geoffrey and the Remsfords had seen the body of the murdered girl consigned to the grave, he felt that the only true love he could ever have given to woman was buried with Sophie's coffin; that his heart was dead within him. How could he pretend love and devotion for any other woman?

When her remains were transferred to New York, they were placed beneath a costly monument his love had reared to her memory in the beautiful cemetery of Greenwood. No one but George Fenton knew that the simple inscription engraved without date on the monument,

TO BELOVED SOPHIE,

referred to the murdered actress, Sophie Vernon. Not even Geoffrey Sims, the husband.

And in his remarkable infatuation he had persuaded himself it would be wrong to offer the mere empty shell of a heart to Ada Remsford.

"She deserves better," he thought, "and in time she will see that happiness with me is only a dream. Love for another and worthier object will replace the transient affection for me. I will devote myself to the capture and punishment of Sophie's slayer."

And that was the reason he had plunged into books, ever seeking to discover in the histories of other murder cases some clew or hint that would enable him to hunt down and drag to the gallows the guilty Becham. That was why he had consorted with detectives, paid lavish sums for suggestions, and wandered about the world in fruitless searches.

What a barren, profitless rôle he had chosen—that of the avenger!

The voice of his old friend Cramson now sounded in his ears, repeating the words, "'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' Leave justice to the Almighty, George. He will bring the assassin to punishment in His own time, in His own way. Nothing but evil can come to yourself by usurping the prerogative of the Almighty."

How often had the lawyer said those words!

He was thinking of all this now while walking silently with Mr. Cramson, when his reverie was suddenly ended by the lawyer's exclamation:

"Here we are at last."

They were before the door of Mr. Remsford's house. Fenton started and would have withdrawn, but the lawyer's hand was on his arm.

"Resolution, George, strengthens with action. Come, let us go in and act."

Fenton followed his friend up the stoop and entered. He had not been inside the doors for a month, and, with the newly awakened sense of obligation to Ada, the fact of this neglect deepened his remorse. How brutally selfish he must have appeared!

"Ah! I have been detestable," he exclaimed on beholding Ada's calm, pure face tinged with the silent sadness that must have been eating into her heart for two years. "Good, noble girl!"

Mr. Cramson cleverly led Mrs. Remsford away to another room, feigning an interest in some new picture her husband had bought that day.

George sat down at Ada's side.

"Dear Ada," he said tenderly.

She started with surprise, blushed scarlet, and almost immediately again became pale.

"Dear Ada, can you forgive me? I have been in a dream, it seems—a sad, melancholy dream, for two years. I have only just awakened from it—to realize my own shocking indelicacy. Can you forgive me? Can you pardon what must have seemed such brutal indifference?"

"I knew you were ill, dear George—that you were suffering. We all knew it. You must not speak of yourself in that cruel way."

"Then you can forgive me-you do?" he asked

again, taking her hand.

"There is nothing to forgive, dear George—only joy to be felt—that you have at last recovered. Do you know that Mr. Cramson always

told us you would get better; that time would cure your strange malady."

"Time has worked a change, darling. Dear, good Cramson was right. He has been my physician, dearest. Do you wish to know what was the malady, or can you pardon without—"

"Why should I wish to know unless you wish to tell, dear George," said Ada, looking calmly

into his face.

"I would wish never to tell—never to allude to it—to bury it forever with—the rest," replied George unsteadily.

"Then bury it, dear George. We will never

speak of it again."

"Dearest and best!" he exclaimed.

For a few moments they were both silent.

"Do you know why I have come to-night, dear Ada?" he asked presently, in a low voice.

"To tell me of your recovery, I suppose,"

answered the girl shyly.

"Yes, to tell you that, and to ask you to crown

your forgiveness by a still greater favor."

He was speaking very low and very earnestly now. Her heart fluttered. What could he mean? How could si e crown her forgiveness but in one way?

"Can you guess, Ada dear?" he whispered, drawing closer to her, and putting his arm about

her waist.

"I think-I think you mean," she murmured.

"I mean by consenting to become my wife, soon, very soon—oh! as soon, darling, as you possibly can."

"Oh! dear George!"

A few moments afterward Ada, leaning on George's arm, stood before her mother.

Mr. Cramson jumped to his feet, anticipating the sweet explanation trembling on the girl's lips. He took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Let me be the first to congratulate," he cried, joyfully. "As George's second father, I may claim that right."

"Ada!" exclaimed Mrs. Remsford, with a quick glance at George. "Ada, my child, can—"

"You can," cried George Fenton, embracing the happy mother. "You can congratulate me. She has at last named the day again. We will be united, with your consent, two weeks from to-day."

CHAPTER XXXV.

Society was going to be furnished with another sensation—a sort of peace-offering. And George Fenton, with all his eccentricities, was to be taken back to its bosom, for, at last, he was going to be wedded.

Great were the preparations in progress. It was to be a grand affair, this wedding, not at all like Geoffrey Sims' third marriage two years before; which was a strictly private family affair, as befitted the peculiar circumstances of the case. For, of course, after poor Sophie's tragic taking off, Geoffrey and Kate had to be made man and wife all over again, in compliance with law and good morals. Then there was only an early visit to the little church around the corner, that is to

say, St. Stephen's, where the knot was tied, followed by a nuptial mass, attended only by the bridegroom's mother, Mr. Cramson and George Fenton, besides the much-married couple—a little wedding-breakfast, and an advertisement in the newspapers. But for this of George Fenton and Ada Remsford all the world was invited. There were bridesmaids galore and groomsmen and pages and what not. The trousseau was to be discussed in the newspapers, the presents described, and all the minutiæ heralded to an eager world. Yes, and pretty sketches of bride and groom-but no portraits. Journalism had not then reached that advanced stage when every happy couple was to behold her and his picture spread before the public in every morning paper side by side, perhaps with the portraits of the latest addition to the demi-monde, or the newest victim of the electrocuting chair.

It was the day before that fixed for the wedding. George had just executed his will, drawn by the careful hand of Mr. Cramson, who had joked rather unsparingly about the incongruity of the thing. The two, that is, George and Cramson, were sitting alone in the lawyer's library the last day they would spend together thus; for, of course, George and Ada would enter their own establishment soon after their marriage. Two happy, gladsome years they had been for the old lawyer, notwithstanding the eccentric ways of his younger companion. He was thinking of the approaching separation with an odd pang of loneliness already about his heart, though he covered it bravely by an assumption of jocosity at George's expense.

Well the younger companion understood what was passing in the other's mind, for there was something of the same kind of feeling in his own breast, which, unlike the lawyer, he could not altogether prevent being reflected on his countenance. The old gentleman had twined about his heartstrings in such a way that this sundering of the tie would be sure to cause laceration. Could it not be made easier and softer in some way, George was wondering? Could not the lawyer be coaxed from his isolation, and induced in the days to come to play father to Ada and himself in their own establishment?

A very radiant, hopeful picture was George drawing of the happy hours thus to be, when Sam, the colored servant, brought him a card—"Mr. Jephton Stratter."

George turned the card over in his hand several times with a puzzled look.

"Gentleman says you dunno him, sir," said Sam.

"No, I do not, Sam, sure enough. Mr. Jephton Stratter has the advantage of me. And, if his business is not pressing, I would rather not be disturbed at present."

The elder member of the friendly firm looked gratefully at the younger.

"Says 'tis very 'portant, and would be real 'bliged ef you'd a see 'em," Sam explained.

"Then I suppose I muss 'blige 'em, Sam, eh? Ef his business is so 'portant, can't wriggle out of it, can I?" said Fenton pleasantly.

"Spose not, sir."

Fenton rose with a sort of sigh and walked out of the library.

In a little reception room off the hall downstairs he saw a low-sized, but broad-shouldered dark-haired man, whose general appearance gave him an unpleasant start. With a flutter of curious apprehension he recognized the outward marks of a detective, and asked himself what business he could have with him at such a time.

The little man rose respectfully and bowed to Fenton when he entered.

"I'm from Sharp, sir—Caleb Sharp, my pardner, sir," said the man.

"Indeed!"

There was intense expectancy in his face in a moment.

"Has he any news?"

"Very, very important—that's why I came. He couldn't leave—so I came for him."

Fenton was now all excitement. His face assumed a hard, keen expression.

- "What is it? Tell me at once. Has he seen him? or what?"
- "Thinks he has seen him, sir," replied Jephton Stratter.
 - "Where? where? Why don't you go on?"
 - "Over in Brooklyn."
 - "Great Heaven! and when?"
- "This morning. Jerusalem, how you prod a fellow!" exclaimed the detective.
- "And did he follow him—hunt him down—hold him? My God, man, why don't you go on? Don't waste words. Out with it all at once."
- "Yes, sir; followed him to this city—to a house in Madison Street, and—"

Stratter hesitated.

"And what?"

"There he lost him, sorry to say."

"What!!!" in almost a scream, and choking with uncontrollable wrath. "Lost him after finding him! Let him escape. Monstrous! It's a lie!—can't be! Monstrous, man!"

And in his passion Fenton grasped the stout arm of the little man roughly and shook him fiercely.

"The devil!" shouted the detective, jerking his arm away in no very gentle manner. Then suddenly remembering himself he added: "Ex—cuse me—but you know I'm not accustomed to this sort of thing a bit. We'll get on faster quietly, sir."

"Has he escaped? Can't you say yes or no at once without any floundering?" yelled Fenton.

"Hang it, no, no, no. Will that do?"

The little man was getting roused.

"Then what do you mean, in Heaven's name?"

"Only that he disappeared—"

Fenton staggered, and would have fallen but for the celerity of the detective in running to his aid, catching him in his arms and placing him on a chair. All the blood was in Fenton's face and the vessels of the temples swelling as if ready to burst. Jephton Stratter feared it was an apoplectic stroke and was on the point of ringing for assistance when Fenton rallied. The deep scarlet flush receded from the face, leaving it almost livid; he breathed heavily still, with lips closed tightly; but he was evidently mastering the tremendous mental excitement rapidly. This was shown especially by his eyes.

"I am very sorry, sir, to cause you such dis-

tress. But you misunderstand. The fellow cannot escape, as you seem to think. Have no fears on that point," said the detective, hoping to calm the gentleman more quickly.

"Well—well. But wait—a—moment—more," stammered Fenton, trying to rise but failing. "This

-thing-is not quite-quite over yet."

The detective stood at his side watching anxiously the gradual lessening of the labored breathing and the return of normal color to the cheeks.

"Go on now," said Fenton at last.

- "I was saying he can't escape now we know he is here," began Stratter.
 - "Did Sharp follow him into the house?"
- "Not immediately; that would have been imprudent. He had to wait for help—for another man to watch at the entrance outside while he searched the rooms. The fellow could have slipped out while Sharp was engaged looking from room to room. Don't you see? So he had to wait till another officer came along."
 - "Well, and then?" demanded Fenton.
- "He went all through the house, and blest if he could find him high or low," answered the detective.
- "Then, after all, he did escape?" cried Fenton savagely again. "What else does your report mean? He got out of that house, or—"
- "Disguised so cleverly that my pard was fooled. The fellow is uncommon smart, Mr. Fenton, but he can't dodge us long; every point is covered. Don't fret about it, sir, or blame us. If he's in that house we'll nail him; if he's not, we know how to trail him again."

Fenton had risen during this apologetic explanation with a darkened brow again. Now he spoke in a hard, determined tone.

"If I had been there, I would have had the ruffian by the throat before he could have disappeared. What nonsense, monstrous nonsense, to follow him deliberately, instead of seizing him the first moment. But, by Heaven, he sha'n't escape, as you say. Wait for me here a few minutes. I will go with you. I'm all right again."

The broker certainly walked away apparently quite himself again. He hurried to his own room and hastily wrote two notes—one for Ada, the other for Cramson. In the latter he stated he was obliged to go downtown on some urgent business, and it was possible he might not be able to return before morning; in that case he requested his friend to see the note he inclosed for Ada was delivered.

He left these two letters, one within the other, on his table in such a conspicuous way that the servant would be sure to take notice. Then he put on his hat, buttoned up his coat, and rejoined the detective.

"Let us go now," he said.

"You're sure you're strong enough?"

"Quite—firm as a rock."

They went out together, and were soon lost in the crowds on Broadway.

Not many minutes after, Geoffrey Sims, with his young son, now between three and four years old, was ushered into the lawyer's library. Mr. Cramson was sitting precisely as Fenton had left him—only his eyes were now closed—which was

why it happened he was unaware of the presence of visitors until Master Geoffrey Fisher Sims ran against his knee and clambered into his lap, shouting, "Hallo, Unky Henry!" He clapped two chubby little hands against the lawyer's rugged cheeks.

Geoffrey thought the old gentleman's eyes looked moist; perhaps he had a cold.

"Well, well!" cried Mr. Cramson, lifting the boy in both hands above his head, "where have you dropped from, my boy?"

A scream of delight and some vigorous kicking from two little legs against his arms was the only response. Master G. F. had to be let down and placed a-straddle one of the lawyer's thighs, in order that he might the better investigate the mysteries of the big watch and chain quickly placed in his hands as peace-offerings.

"The young scamp wants you to come riding with us, Mr. Cramson," said Geoffrey, after greeting the lawyer. "He made me promise to call for you and George. Will you come? It is splendid outdoors. Say yes, and finish up by dining with us."

"Yes," heartily; "but we will have to wait for George. There is somebody with him downstairs. Our last day here, you know, Geoffrey."

"Ah! I'm afraid you'll miss him. But you can't imagine how glad Kate is over the wedding. She thinks it's the very thing for him."

"And so it is, my friend. He'll be a different man. I'm sure of that. But let's see if he's through with his visitor."

Mr. Cramson rose to ring for Sam, still holding the child in his arms.

"Just a moment, Mr. Cramson, before you ring. I want to tell you something that's on Kate's mind—very near her heart, I should say. She was thinking, you know, that after George goes into his own place, you might—that you might break up your solitary establishment here, and come to us."

"Bless her sweet heart!" exclaimed Mr. Cramson.

"You see it would be awfully nice for us all. Kate has quite set her heart on it, and my mother, too. You know how much my mother thinks of you. There's no need for you to go on with the law; but of course, if you don't want to give it up, that would make no difference."

Mr. Cramson pulled the bell as he said:

"Geoffrey, I am profoundly touched, and I will think over it. I don't know but it's time to go in for some play. But we'll postpone the question till after the ride."

Sam appeared in answer to the call.

"Ask Mr. Fenton if he'll soon be disengaged. Tell him Mr. Sims wants him to go out for a drive."

"Mr. Fenton has gone out," said Sam.

"Out! oh, no! that can't be. Go to his room—he may be there," said Mr. Cramson, and Sam obeyed. "I don't think he would have gone off that way, for he seemed particularly anxious to be with me, the dear fellow. I am going to miss him sadly. That's a fact. It will be dreary here, sure enough. What do you say, Geffy?"

Mr. Cramson held the child out at arm's length.
Sam entered at the moment with a letter in his
hand

"He's not in the house, sir. I found this in his room, sir," said the darkey.

The lawyer broke the envelope and took out the short note for himself, noticing at the same time the little sealed note for Miss Ada.

"Hello! what's this?" he cried. "A note for Ada, too!"

He read his own quickly, and then, turning to Geoffrey, said:

"That's a queer proceeding. I don't know what to make of it. It smacks of mystery. What urgent business can George have to call him downtown to-day? And to keep him all night, perhaps? Upon my word it's odd. What do you think?"

He handed the note to Geoffrey.

"Oh! goodness only knows," said Geoffrey, after reading. "Shall we call at Remsford's on the way and deliver the other?"

The lawyer reflected for a moment, and shook his head.

"I think not. He asks me to keep it till morning, you see. But I don't like the thing somehow. I can't see why he didn't come here before going out to tell me what he wished to be done, instead of wasting time over a letter," said Cramson, gravely.

"Perhaps he was in a hurry—hadn't time—didn't want to be detained; or perhaps he did not want you to question him," suggested Geoffrey.

"That's what I fear. But there's nothing to be done. We must keep the little billet-doux until morning. I'll be with you in a moment."

Mr. Cramson put on his light ulster, and five

minutes after got into Geoffrey's carriage, with the boy on his knee, and they drove off to the Park.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was about six o'clock the same afternoon that Mme. Vernay happened to be walking along Henry Street with prayer-book and beads in her hands. She had been to her church, and was returning to her residence on the eastern side of the street, and not far from the place of worship. Her eyes were bright, but troubled-looking, and her lips were moving as if still reciting a prayer. As she got within half a block of the respectable three-story brick house, the two lower floors of which were occupied as her own dwelling, she noticed a boy going up the stoop and ringing the bell. He had a letter in his hand.

"What can it be—from whom?" thought Mme. Vernay, and one would have said that her pale face grew a shade paler at the moment. Certainly the hand holding her beads was pressed to her left side as if a sudden pang was there.

The boy had rung three times before she reached the stoop to ask him his business.

"I have a letter for a lady living here," said the boy.

"Let me zee. I am ze only lady in zis house."
She took the letter and said:

"Yes, it is for me."

The boy started away.

"Wait if there is an answer," she called after

him. But the boy ran off as if not hearing, and was soon gone. Then she opened the note and read:

"DEAR MME. VERNAY—Will you call at my room downtown as soon as possible, as I wish to see you before leaving town. I am going away early to-morrow after my marriage, and I have something I would like to say to you this afternoon. If you can come at once I will be obliged, for I am now disengaged, and may not be so later. Please wait if I happen to be out.

"Yours truly,
"GEORGE FENTON."

The Frenchwoman seemed relieved and murmured: "I was afraid it was from the other."

She looked at her watch.

"Six o'clock. I will not have much time, but enough, I think, to return before eight, if he does not detain me too long."

She went down the stoop again, walked quickly to the corner, and proceeded toward East Broadway.

That her movements had been watched was evident, for three men suddenly appeared as soon as she was out of sight, and proceeded to the house. One of the three, just before ascending the stoop, said:

"Remember, you are not to enter on any account until I give the signal. But keep a good watch, front and rear."

"I would rather go with you. It's not safe, sir, alone," said one of the others.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed he who had spoken first.

Then he walked up the stoop, took a latch-key from his pocket, and opened the door. He tossed the key to his companions and entered. The two left on the sidewalk went away in opposite directions. Let us follow the man inside.

He went direct to the end of the hall and unlocked the door of a room. It was a small bathroom opening into the rear apartment. Before entering this he re-locked the bathroom door. It was with extreme caution he passed into the rear apartment, treading lightly, as if fearing to alarm some one who might be hiding. After a quick glance all around he approached the partly opened folding doors, and peered into the front apartment.

There was no one there.

Then he tried all the doors. They were locked. He searched carefully every spot where a human being might be lurking.

No one; no one.

"He is not here," said the man, seating himself in a cushioned armchair, with a long breath: "So far, so good."

He had been in the identical apartments, at least in the parlor, more than a score of times before. Still his eyes scanned every article of furniture with the closest attention. There was a large folding-sofa in the parlor, covered with rugs; a piano; a center-table, holding books and little knick-knacks; a sort of buffet, containing pretty china ornaments, besides decanters and glasses, and within, wines, brandy and cordials; two low settees in opposite corners, and eight or ten chairs

scattered carelessly about the room. On the mantel was a fine French bronze clock and two bronze vases. The windows were heavily curtained.

In the rear room stood a large canopied bedstead between the windows; also a writing desk, a high mahogany wardrobe, several easy chairs, including a special one for reading, supplied with movable book-holder; and finally, three stools. Both rooms were quite richly carpeted, and there was altogether about Mme. Vernay's apartments an air of comfort, if not refinement.

"There is only one place a person could hide here," thought George Fenton—for of course it was no other—" and that shall be my port. A wardrobe for my sentry-box."

He went to the wardrobe, opened it and stepped in.

He could move about freely, for it was almost empty of clothes. He tried the key inside the lock. It worked smoothly and softly.

But his boots creaked on the polished floor; so he spread his own top-coat over it, and then resumed the comfortably upholstered armchair—to watch and wait.

A marble statue could hardly have appeared more fixed. There was not a stir of hand, foot or head; only the rising and falling of the broad chest in the involuntary respirations to denote that a living, breathing person was there.

And thus he waited and watched, the minutes dragging along slowly, wearily. How long each second must have appeared only he could tell.

The daylight fled, and he was still there in the gloom and silence.

The twilight deepened and darkness surrounded him; still he sat unmoved.

When at last the street lamps were lighted and a few faint rays made their way through the windows he stirred slightly and murmured:

"Some one must come soon-very soon now."

He was right, for almost with the words his ears, now preternaturally sharp, heard a key inserted into the hall door lock; then the opening and closing; the shuffling of feet through the hall; the hand shaking the parlor door knob!

Quick as lightning he was within the wardrobe, closing its door. His heart beat wildly and his hands trembled with excitement, not with fear, as he heard the opening, closing and re-locking of the parlor door and—and—two voices whispering!

A match was next struck by one of the whisperers, and the gas lit.

In hastily closing, Fenton had forgotten to lock the wardrobe door, which now, he also found, he had allowed to remain the least bit open. Through the line of opening thus left, his eyes were able to see into the parlor, and there stood Mme. Vernay and—another woman, veiled!

"Sit down now and tell me what ze mattair is?" said Mme. Vernay. "What is dere dat is new dat you have so 'fraid?"

The second woman pushed aside her veil and sank into one of the chairs. Fenton could only see a small part of a coarse profile, but the voice, though low and disguised, caused him to start.

"It is he-he-not a woman," he muttered.

"Charlotte, I am sure I was followed to-day rom Brooklyn to the Madison Street house. I only escaped by climbing the yard fence and jumping into the lot at the side of the house, and from there on to this street. I went back at once to Brooklyn and put on this wretched disguise. For nearly two hours I have been lurking about near here, waiting for you to show at the window. I was afraid to venture in without seeing you. How could I tell who might be here?"

"Mon pauvre! I was away to see Mr.—
some one, and did not expect you before ze eight
o'clock. It is no eight I t'ink yet. Mais, why you
t'ink dey follow you? You can be mistaken. You
have fear—only imagine—n'est-ce pas?"

"I wish to God it was only imagination. No, no, they are on my track—they know I'm here, and now I don't know how I'm ever to get away again. I must keep close here till near morning and then be off somewhere, God only knows where," said Horace Becham—for he it was—in a nervous despairing tone. "I've not touched food since morning—not a morsel—not even a drink."

"Ah! den I muss give you eat and drink. I have some here. Mais oui, le poulet froid et le vin," said Mme. Vernay, compassionately. "Here is some wine," taking a bottle from the buffet.

"Have you brandy—a little good brandy?" asked Becham, greedily. "I'm shaken all to pieces and need something strong—stronger than wine."

"Yes, here is ze buffet. Come, help you. I will go downstairs for ze poulet and bread. You will drink now."

She passed into the bedroom, opened the door, and went down to the kitchen.

Becham approached the buffet and poured out a good glassful of brandy, which he swallowed at once and with relish.

"I don't think I'll have many more chances for drinks like that. The fellows will pounce on me sure. Yes, I'm doomed—doomed—unless I can get away from this accursed city again unobserved. Why did I come, anyhow? It was madness, downright madness. I ought to have known they'd be looking for me sure with all the money on my head. But, God, what a life I've had these two years, wandering, wandering, always with the fear of knocking against some one who'd recognize me. D-n near it I came, too, once in Paris. That devil Fenton passed as close to me as this dresser. I thought I was done for, but he passed me without seeing. Ugh! what a scare I got! How I shook for five minutes after! And that fellow's eyes seem to follow me. Wherever I go I imagine he's after me. I wonder why? It's the other I ought to dread, and don't. I never think of the Californian. Only Fenton. Fenton always."

Mme. Vernay, returning, shut the bedroom door with a noise, which made Becham start and pull out his pistol quickly.

"Oh! it's only you! Confound it, why did you make such a row? I thought it was somebody else. D—n me if I didn't think it was Fenton."

The pistol shook in his nervous hand.

"Horace, put pistol away. Never use it again, mon pauvre—"

"What do you mean by again? I never shot anybody in my life," roared Horace.

"No, but you kill woman, and you come to kill

man some time if you keep ze pistol. Horace, you muss repent—be good—prepare to die. Dat is ze way to get courage."

"Courage! yes, I need that, sure enough; for my nerves are nowhere. But your pious dodge won't do for me just yet, woman. Get me out of here and you may make a saint of me, if you like. D—n it, you were as bad, worse than meself, be George. Wasn't it you put me up to the hellish job, woman?"

His eyes glared murderously at the thin woman. He fingered the pistol as if he would like to send some of its contents crashing into her brains. But she remained undaunted, nevertheless.

"No, not to kill, Horace—not to kill—nevair dat."

"Well, the killing resulted from your d—d plot. What a hellish fool I was to go into it. It was your job, d—n you, your job—not mine. I would never have thought of it alone. And then, to do it all for nothing—only to kill and then to have to run without the spoils! Curse you for it all!"

Whether it was the brandy or the sudden remembrance of his companion's part in the work that caused his ire, Horace Becham in a moment forgot all caution, and shouted his curses in a loud voice.

"Hush!" cried Mme. Vernay. "Some one can hear."

Becham cowered, relapsing into silence at once.

"Yes, I forgot. Excuse me. I'm mad—mad with fear," he moaned. Then, with a tremor, he whispered:

"My God! is there anybody upstairs?"

"No; since two weeks I am alone; ze oder tenant go, and I send my domestique too when you come. But dey can hear you in ze street if you cry."

"Yes, yes," said Horace, much relieved.

"Zat is bettair. Now I put ze poulet and ze bread here. You will sit and eat. I will make ze warm café."

She placed the things on a table in the bedroom, not five paces from the wardrobe, and Horace sat down. Fenton could have shot him in an instant, but he would not.

When Mme. Vernay had gone downstairs again, Becham poured down more brandy and began to eat, muttering to himself all the while.

"She is good to me, Charlotte is, and her religion must be something to make her forget how I tried to kill her. Ah! I wish I could get religion like her. Yes, be George, there's some good in it to change her the way she is now."

Mme. Vernay came back with milk and a coffee urn, which she placed on the buffet. She applied a match to the lamp that the water might boil.

"Now you feel bettair—yes? Ze poulet is good—ze chicken—yes?"

"Tip-top," murmured the man. "I'm getting strong, and drowsy too. Ah! if I could get one good sleep, what a different man I'd be! When I close my eyes and go off for a moment, I dream of the d—d police, and wake with a shiver. Ah! it's awful, Charlotte, awful! I wish to God I was like you, pious and all that. Perhaps I would get courage as you say—at least enough to give myself up, and be done with all this

hiding and flying and trembling. I'm afraid even to get drunk now; even that comfort's gone."

"Ah! some you speak is well, mon pauvre. It is God, God only, can you give courage. Go to God. Come wiss me to my priest to-morrow. You will see how bettair you will be," said Mme. Vernay, solemnly. She touched his shoulder with her thin long hand.

"D—d if I don't feel like doing it," he blubbered.

"Don't speak e zat way, Horace," she said.

"Well, give me some more brandy."

She poured out a small quantity of the liquor, saying: "You muss not too much take. You muss have ze tete—ze head—how you say—strong. No is true?"

"Yes, you are right," he said.

He drank, nevertheless, and soon began to ramble in his talk—mostly about religion and the life in Canada. After awhile, too, his mood changed to the melancholy, and tears flowed from his eyes.

"Charlotte," he said at last, "I will go with you to your clergyman. D—nit, anything is better than this. You take me to-morrow, early, Charlotte. Let me get out early, and I'll try."

"It is good, Horace, vera good. I have pray for you, oh! so much, evra day and evra night. Now you will lay down and sleep for be strong in ze morning. Lay you down now. I will watch."

"I want to, but I can't."

"Yes, you can, try, Say little prayer first," pleaded the Frenchwoman.

"Oh! d—n it, I don't know any—not one," he grumbled.

"Lissen me, Horace. Before I pray I no sleep, too. Evra night I zee ze Sophie—ze pauvre Sophie, as I zee her dat day, on ze sofa, in her room. She comes to my bed evra night and look at wiss ze eyes—oh, si tristes, si tristes! Mon Dieu! how I weep. But now, Horace, if she come I no zee ze eyes so sad; she smile—look glad, and I no go sad mesel'. I know she have pardon me."

Horace's eyes were starting out of his head while the Frenchwoman spoke.

"And—you—mean—she—she—comes to your bed now?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"Yes, see; she come here," replied the Frenchwoman, going to the side of her own bed. "She stan' here, and she look me so glad."

"What! what! in this house!—at that bed!!!" he cried, starting up and backing into the front room, followed by his companion.

"I would not sleep there for all the world—no—not in that bed," he groaned.

"Then lie down here."

She drew him toward the sofa, and forced him gently to lie down.

"There, I will watch for you, Horace. Be not 'fraid. Sleep to be strong. Do not speak. Close eyes."

The man must have been utterly played out as well as cowed, for he obeyed like a child. In a few moments he was asleep, but breathing heavily. A disturbed sleep—the sleep of the hunted and haunted wretch. When he seemed to be sound, Mme. Vernay got up softly and went out into the hall.

There was no sound.

She returned, put on her bonnet, turned the

gas low, went to the hall door, opened it, and ran quickly down the stoop.

Lightly as she had closed the hall door, the sound reached the sleeper's ears. He started up wildly.

"What's that?—Who's that?—Alone!—Charlotte gone!—What does it mean!"

He looked about thoroughly affrighted.

"Has she gone away—left me here alone—alone? Ah! and perhaps that dead woman will come to stare at me too! Ah! God! the light—the light!"

He ran to turn on the gas stronger.

He turned it out altogether.

He could not suppress a scream in the pitchy darkness.

There was a noise in the back room, like a step—a stealthy step. The woman! the dead woman!

"Who's there?" he cried, staggering back and stumbling over a chair.

At the same moment a flash came before his eyes. Then an explosion.

"A pistol! God! I am trapped—trapped by her, too!"

He scrambled to his feet and listened.

All was still again.

His eyes tried to penetrate the darkness. He could see no one.

A noise in the street made him start again. He would have rushed to the inner room, but superstitious fear chained him to the spot where he stood, pistol in hand, ready to fire—fear of that room where the dead Sophie walked, or stood, as the Frenchwoman had pictured her, at the bedside.

But the noise in the street was growing louder and nearer.

Steps were on the stoop.

Hands were on the door.

People were in the hall.

Loud knocks at the front and rear rooms.

Then he made a desperate dash through the folding-doors, reached one of the windows by the bed, and was raising it when two hands clutched his neck with a grip of iron and forced him back.

Then a voice at his ear—the voice of Fenton, like that of an avenging angel, shouted:

"Break in the doors and light the gas."

Quick as lightning Becham pointed his pistol backward, until he felt it touched Fenton's body.

Then he fired.

There was only one cry, one "Ah!"

The grip about Becham's throat relaxed a little, for a second.

Then it tightened again before Becham could free himself, and the murderer was dragged down to the floor, wildly but vainly striving to loosen the hold about his throat. The pistol fell from his grasp.

The doors were burst. open

Men rushed in.

The gas was relit, and the awful spectacle disclosed of Fenton, the blood gushing from a wound in his left side, still clinging to the assassin, clutching his neck with the grip of death.

Becham's face was black, the tongue protruding from his mouth.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

It was the work of but a moment to separate the two prostrate men. Fenton's nails had pierced the neck of the detective.

"Is he dead?" asked the wounded broker, when his head was raised on the knee of one of the policemen.

"You've finished him, sure," was the answer from the little detective Stratter, who, only four or five hours before, had been with Fenton in Mr. Cramson's reception-room.

"Thank God," murmured Fenton, who imme-

diately fainted from loss of blood.

A surgeon was quickly summoned, and did what was possible.

"What's the chance, Doc?" asked Stratter.

"Not one in a thousand."

"Too bad! too bad!" exclaimed little Stratter.
"It was the pluckiest thing I ever knew. I wanted to come in with him—yes, I did; but he wouldn't listen to such a thing—and now—ah! poor gentleman, see the result. Shot fatally. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, I'm sorry to say there's little hope," said the surgeon in an undertone. "But we must not talk loud, you see. He may hear. Let us lift him on this bed, and then send for the best surgeons we can find. We must give him all chances possible."

"Then you don't want him taken to his own

home?" asked Detective Stratter.

"No; he couldn't stand the motion. If we can use this place and the bed there, it will be much safer," said the surgeon.

"No trouble on that point, Doc. The woman who rents the place was taken in by us awhile ago as she left the house. She was after provisions, I believe, when we took her. You never saw anybody so surprised looking when we told her she was under arrest. Then just after the signal agreed upon—the firing of his pistol—we ran to his assistance," explained Detective Stratter.

"Then we'll keep him here and put him on the bed. But first let me see what can be done for this woman," observed the surgeon, turning to the prostrate body of Becham.

"It's a man—not a woman—only a disguise," said Stratter.

"Well, man or woman, it's all over there anyhow. The body should be got away from here as quickly as possible. That's the worst choking I ever saw. What a grip our other friend must have," remarked the surgeon, examining Becham's lacerated throat.

"Yes; it's simply awful," assented the detective in a whisper. "Do you know I think he intended to do just that. That's why he didn't want anybody else with him. Curious, isn't it? but it was just in the same way this dead one murdered a girl himself two years ago in Canada. You know who the parties are, don't you?"

The surgeon shook his head.

"This is George Fenton, the broker; the other is the Canadian policeman who strangled Sophie Vernon, the actress, in Montreal," explained Stratter.

"Ah! I remember the case," said the surgeon.

"And Mr. Fenton was to have been married tomorrow. Poor gentleman!" "And poor lady, too!" added the surgeon.
"But come, let us place him on the bed; no more time to lose."

The officers complied as gently as possible. The movement roused George Fenton to consciousness, and he moaned, but he relapsed immediately.

All this time, very different scenes were enacting at the homes of some of George Fenton's friends.

Lights sparkled brightly in the Remsford home, and people were coming and going. Mamma and papa were smiling gayly over all the pleasant speeches of congratulating friends who called for that purpose—and to view the wedding presents.

Ada was in her own room, admiring her bridal dress and thinking of George, at last to be her own George. Only one short night more. But why did he not come? Every sound of the door-bell brought a new blush of expectation to her cheeks, only to fade away as often from disappointment. George did not come. Why? oh! why?

In the gorgeous Sims dining-room sat Mr. Cramson, hemmed in between the two Sims ladies, wife and mother. Geoffrey was opposite the lawyer. There was no other guests. Bravely had the old lawyer exerted himself to respond to the gayeties of Mrs. Kate. His heart was heavy with a gloomy apprehension he could not shake off, and his own mood soon crept over the rest.

At nine o'clock he rose to say "good-night." Geoffrey decided to accompany him home.

"You know, Mr. Cramson, when a man like you shows anxiety it is apt to become contagious. I saw your distress all the evening, and I could not

help feeling some myself," observed Geoffrey, when they were alone in the carriage. "Do you suppose anything has happened."

"The whole proceeding of George before he went out is very suspicious. I felt anxious the first moment, and the feeling grew on me all the evening until I could bear it no longer. It was martyrdom to sit with your wife and mother trying to smother the wretched whisperings of fear. That is all I can say, except that I'm glad you've come back with me. It will be a comfort to have you to talk to if there is no news of George."

"May I ask what definite form your fears take? Are you thinking of any special danger?" asked Geoffrey. "After all, what danger is to be apprehended from any quarter? Why should George be in any peril?"

Mr. Cramson was not prepared with an exact explanation for his own fears. But he shook his head sadly and said:

"It's hard to say, my boy. I own, however, the ruffian Becham has been running in my head—an impression is on me that George's all night business—reflect, too, the night before his wedding when he ought to be with Ada—is some way mixed up with the Montreal murder. Pardon referring to the subject, my friend, but it's unavoidable."

No more was said until they were both in the cosy library again, smoking in a dismal sort of fashion—at least for Geoffrey. The lawyer seemed to find solace, however, for he remarked:

"What comfort there is in a cigar! Thought, too. I always meditate and reason better puffing tobacco."

"Yes, it's rather soothing—sometimes," answered Geoffrey.

"Inspiring," returned the old gentleman.

Geoffrey felt he was only growing more confused about George.

"Do you know—would you believe it, Geoffrey, since I lit this cigar I begin to see clearly. Geoffrey, there's something wrong, believe me, there is. George went away to do something dangerous."

Geoffrey was so startled by the lawyer's solemn manner that he let his Havana drop and then forgot to pick it up. It lay smoking at his feet, singeing the rug.

A long silence ensued. Fifteen minutes-half an hour - without a word between the two men only a few feet apart, and wide awake-too wide awake. The smoke clouds curled about the fine head of the old lawyer. In Geoffrey's eyes they took most fantastic shapes. At one moment they were little imps dancing in wild revelry-next they became long ugly grinning specters, growing larger and larger until lost in the dark shadows of the ceiling. Then human faces began to emerge from the smoke wreaths, faces he had seen in London, Paris, New York, San Francisco-the face of his father as his imagination had often pictured it on the death bed-the face of the French womanand—and—ah, yes, the face of poor Sophie, smiling, weeping, lovely, torn, disfigured, scarred, strangled!

The cold perspiration dropped from his browhe was shaking, as he jumped to his feet with a cry that startled the lawyer out of a reverie.

"Excuse me," said Geoffrey, ashamed of his strange agitation.

"What was that you cried? I—thought—it was George's voice. What trick imagination plays!"

Both relapsed into painful silence, which continued for long—very long—like hours to Geoffrey.

Suddenly the hall-door bell rang—sharp and angry. Both gentlemen started to their feet, nervously regarding each other, but speechless. And thus they remained till the sounds of the opening and closing of the door died away—till Sam's heavy feet, mounting the stairs, were heard.

"A gentleman to see you, sir—the same who was here with Mr. Fenton this afternoon," said Sam.

Mr. Cramson dropped back into his seat.

"Shall I go see him, sir?" asked Geoffrey.
"You seem weak and excited."

"No, no; we'll see him together. Show him up here, Sam," said Mr. Cramson.

The little detective, Stratter, shambled awkwardly into the room. One glance from Cramson's keen eyes told him the man had bad news.

"Tell it at once," said the lawyer, with forced calmness.

"I'm sorry, sir, but my news is very serious," began the detective. "Mr. Fenton has been badly hurt—he's—"

"Dead?" exclaimed the lawyer.

"Not yet—but there's no hope, I believe—at least, the doctor don't give any."

Mr. Cramson sat without motion or speech for some seconds—then he broke into a low wail.

"My poor boy! my poor boy! I felt it; I felt it."

Geoffrey, with a very pale face, went to his side and touched him soothingly.

"Where is he?" he inquired of the detective.

In a few clever sentences Stratter told all.

"Come, let us go to him," said Mr. Cramson, brushing away the hot tears.

The surgeons were consulting in the little front parlor of the Henry Street house as Cramson and Geoffrey entered. Dr. Van Buren rose at once, went to Mr. Cramson and whispered:

"It is very sad, my friend, but I don't think he can survive the night. If there is a will to be made, better have it attended to at once."

"Then we can see him?" Mr. Cramson asked

chokingly.

"Certainly, he has been asking for you both, and for the ladies, too, Mr. Sims; for your wife and mother as well as for Miss Remsford. We notified her father, Mr. Remsford, to prepare her for the shock—to bring her if possible, as poor Fenton called for her."

They walked into the bedroom, and the smile that flitted over the face of their suffering friend showed they were recognized.

Mr. Cramson was unable to repress his emotion.

"Ah! my son!" he exclaimed, bending over the bed tenderly.

"It's over—over—all over, dear old friend. A judgment on me. I would not heed your fatherly warning. How often you repeated to me, 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord'? I should have left it to God. Don't weep. It—is—better. Geff, I'm glad—you've—come. Forgive—me—if I—de-

ceived. I—did—once. I have—suffered. For—give—"

His voice was failing fast.

"Dear George, there's nothing you could ever have done that's not forgiven. I have known all a long time, with only pity and love in my heart," Geoffrey whispered into the ear of the dying man.

"God—bless—you, Geff. Love for Kate, your—mother. Oh! could I see them now, but late—too

late."

He closed his eyes. His breathing appeared to have ceased, as if the end had come. But he rallied, and once more spoke faintly:

"Come close. Tell—Ada I—love—her truly. Ask her—forgive—me—too. Dear—sweet—Ada. Geff—fa—ther—fare—well."

They were the last words.

His eyes turned upward with a fixed, wrapt gaze.

There was a quiver.

And George Fenton's soul was free.

A moment—only a moment afterward the hall-door opened again, and there was a rustle of dresses in the front room. Ada, Kate and Mrs. Remsford had come.

The solemn looks of all revealed the truth.

"Too late, too late — oh! merciful God!" moaned the heart-broken girl.

"Oh! George, George, my love—my darling," she cried, falling on the lifeless form of the beloved. "Too late! too late!"



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